

FIVE CENTS

# BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 70

**CHECKMATED  
BY A CADET**  
or Conquered by Chance



BY

**HARRIE IRVING HANCOCK**

One hand and the head of the snake he thrust beyond the angle. The eagle-faced man, on the instant of dashing beyond the angel, found the hissing head close to his face.



# BRAVE & BOLD

*A Different Complete Story Every Week*

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## CHECKMATED BY A CADET:

OR,

## Conquered by Chance.

By HARRIE IRVING HANCOCK.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE VANISHED PARENT.

"Good-by, Phil."

"Good-by, fellows."

"Don't forget us."

"I couldn't, boys."

"A last salute to the lieutenant!" shouted one of the chorus of irrepressibly happy youngsters.

Clang! Coo-shoo! While the train pulled out from the little station four tall, lithe, active boys in gray cadet uniforms ranged themselves in line on the rear platform of the last car.

Four hands ascended with jaunty military precision, touching the brims of four natty forage caps.

Scrupulously exact was the graceful gesture with which the soldierly-looking lad wearing lieutenant's shoulder straps "acknowledged salute."

Out of sight whizzed the train. Gone with it was the last trace of the old, happy schooldays.

Graduated from the Merrill Military Institute, Phil Darley had returned home to Roslin to begin what promised to be the still happier career of young manhood.

For our hero had reached the age of twenty—that magic era in life when the boy dies in a day, and the man springs into instant life and action.

Tall, slender, erect, agile—the ideal soldierly figure—favored of face, sunny of temper, and keen of wit, young Darley was everywhere a favorite.

"Dad's not here," muttered the boy, in a tone of disappointment. "Nor Uncle John, either. Not even the cart. No matter—walking's a specialty of mine."

Not even the lame station agent of Roslin appeared to take temporary charge of the trunks that had been dumped upon the platform.

"They are safe here," smiled Phil, eying the luggage. "Now, right about face, forward, march!"

Back of the station the long, dusty country road appeared. Past a half dozen scattered houses, a quarter of a mile away up on the hill, was visible the old-fashioned, comfortable looking mansion that our hero called home.

With jaunty, military tread Phil marched along the road.

The young cadet's had been a sunshiny life, as far as it had gone.

Born with the proverbial "silver spoon" in his mouth, his boyhood had been as care-free and joyous as the possession of wealth could make it.

Phil's mother had died so long ago that he could barely remember her. Yet he had had a joyful boyhood, for his father and Uncle John, the joint owners of the big house



on the hill, had made the boy's happiness their principal aim in life.

Uncle John was, in reality, no uncle at all. He had been adopted, when a boy, by our hero's grandfather. Reared as brothers, however, Henry and John Darley had been made the old man's joint heirs.

To each had been left a half ownership of the Darley mansion, and more than \$200,000 in cash and bonds.

Henry Darley had never married again. Uncle John seemed likely to remain a bachelor to the end of his days.

For Phil, therefore, who had at present everything that indulgence could suggest, the entire Darley fortune seemed destined.

With such prospects, he had not been trained for any profession.

Now that he had laid the basis of a general education at the military academy, it had been planned by his father and "uncle" to take him on a long tour around the world, preparatory to his settling down to some avocation or calling that would save him from the curse of utter idleness.

At the mansion, as Phil neared it, the same air of desertedness that had prevailed in the village was noticeable.

"Has every soul in the house overslept?" wondered the boy. "But I never knew dad to be in bed so late in the morning."

Passing through the gate, the boy started up the graveled walk to the veranda.

Now some one could be heard inside walking toward the door. Our hero vented an exuberant whistle.

"Here I am, Uncle John," he hailed, as that gentleman appeared in the doorway.

Bounding up the steps, the young cadet gave the old man's hand an affectionate squeeze.

"Where's dad?"

"Not at home, lad, I'm sorry to say," replied John Darley.

A look of disappointment flashed into the boy's face.

"Has he gone away on business, Uncle John?"

"I—I hope so."

"See here, uncle, is there anything wrong? Don't keep me in suspense, please."

Phil's eyes, as he looked straight into the old man's, were so full of searching anxiety that the old man half turned away.

"Come into the library," said John Darley, a trifle huskily.

"If there's anything wrong, sir," pleaded the boy, grasping his uncle's arm as they went through the hallway, "tell me at once. Trying to break it gently would be unintended cruelty."

But John Darley did not answer until, reaching the library, he sank into an armchair and said:

"Take a seat, lad."

But our hero, merely dropping his satchel into the indicated chair, stood erect as he faced his uncle.

"Not until you've told me, sir, what you have to say about dad."

"I hope there's nothing wrong—I don't believe there is," replied the old man, with emotion. "I don't doubt I'm making a mountain out of a very small molehill, but the fact is, Henry went away three days ago—where, I don't know, and for what purpose I can't imagine."

"Is that all?" asked Phil, somewhat relieved.

"That's all," nodded his uncle.

Phil paced the room a moment in thoughtful silence.

"That doesn't sound like as bad news as I had feared," muttered the boy.

"Why, it's all nonsense, my worrying about it, of course," declared John Darley, with an attempt to appear cheerful. "All that made me uneasy was that I had never known your father to do a thing like this before. He and I, as you know, lad, have always been close in each other's confidence. He seldom did anything without consulting me. Three days ago, at half-past nine in the morning, he left the house for a walk. He didn't come back. I've inquired among all the folks in the neighborhood, but I can't learn a word."

"Was he cheerful when he went away?" asked Phil.

"I never saw him in better spirits."

"And in good health?"

"Apparently his health was as perfect as ever in his life."

"Has dad told you anything of late that would give you any idea of what has taken him away?"

"Nothing that I can remember."

Phil threw himself into a chair and stared at the carpet in a brown study.

"What—what do you think?" John Darley at last hesitatingly inquired.

"Think!" retorted Phil, gloomily. "I think it is a serious matter."

"I shall go out now, Uncle John, and make a search myself; I shall leave no stone unturned in this part of the country; I shall work day and night until I find some clew."

"I wish you success, with all my heart," declared John Darley; "but I think your father is sure to return before you can go far."

"I am going down the road, Uncle John, and inquire of everybody I see; if dad should return while I am away, please have Dan run the flag up as high as he can get it on the cupola flagpole. Wherever I am, I will be sure to watch for the flag. If that bunting goes up, Uncle John, I'll come back as fast as my legs can carry me."

Leaving the house, the young cadet walked rapidly down the road. He had not gone far before he heard some one approaching.

Two men, judging by the sound, and Phil had about lost interest in them, when they came suddenly into sight.

A tougher looking pair would be hard to find in jail.

In this estimate Phil was wholly right. Sulky, slouching, evil looking, the two men trudged forward in silence.

Phil, having had a good look at them, averted his eyes.

Though he lay stretched at ease within ten feet of the road, neither of the trampish-looking wayfarers appeared to see him.

Crunch! crunch! crunch! Fainter and fainter grew the tread of the two men as they increased their distance.

Up on his feet leaped Phil, all animation and resolve.

Over the wall, among the trees—a beast of prey stalking its intended game could not have moved with swifter stealth.



## CHAPTER II.

## IMPORTANT CLEWS.

Down the road, at a good deal faster gait than is habitual with tramps, jogged the two men.

Experience teaches caution, and caution often brings success.

Darley was now on his guard not to let his quarry see him.

A long "follow" it proved to be—fearfully long for our exhausted hero.

For four miles he tramped over the hot, dusty way, before he came, at last, to the end of the trail.

A wild spot it was, close down by the river.

There stood a dilapidated little cottage, within stone's throw of the water, and the only human habitation in sight.

Inside disappeared the two men, after a cautious glance around them.

They did not see the boy, who had dropped, panting, behind a fringe of bushes.

It was possible to creep almost up to the door of the shanty without being seen.

Panting and trembling at the same time, our hero accomplished this feat after a deal of trouble.

A droning sound of low, rough voices came from within. Darley listened with strained attention.

"Yep, there's more Darley money left for us to get fat on," remarked the brute, as if in reply to one of his pal's speeches.

"'Sh!"

"I won't say another word."

"An' we'd better sleep until dark. There won't be nothin' to do before then."

"Right, but if we shouldn't wake up on time——"

"What's the alarm clock for?"

"I'll set it now," replied the brute. "Eight o'clock to-night will do."

"Yep."

But few more sounds came from the shanty, until——

"Gurr-rr-rr—wow! Gurr-rr-rr—whee-ee!"

They were asleep, this precious pair of blackguards. After a few minutes, this snoring ceased, to be replaced by deep breathing. Then the nasal tumult began all over again, and under cover of the noise our hero crept away from the shanty.

"Oh, you——" cried the white-faced boy, glaring back at the shanty.

But he paused, shaking his fist menacingly at the invisible sleepers. In the whole range of boyhood's abusive epithets there was not a name expressive enough to apply to the shambling man and his big-fisted confederate.

"First dad, and now Uncle John," the young cadet muttered, chokingly. "But I'll checkmate them, and run their necks into a halter. Oh, oh! the pleasure it would be to see them hung!"

All the while our hero was hurrying toward the road.

"But are they the real movers in this crime?" conjectured young Darley, following a new course of reflection. "Are they deep enough, intelligent enough, to be the prime movers in so big a scheme? It doesn't seem possible. Ah, that we'll find out."

By "we" Phil meant himself and the whole outraged community.

Into his buzzing brain there gradually crept a plan of finding out for himself, and by himself, what this pair of plotters were now up to, and, more important still, who their directing genius was, if they had one.

How interminably long the way back home seemed at the commencement! Tired Phil faced it with dread.

But even at the outset he was in luck, for no sooner had he gained the main road than he espied a farmer's wagon moving in the direction of Roslin.

"Give me a ride?" he asked the farmer.

The farmer reined up, and Phil got on the wagon.

He was soon at his own gate.

Thanking the farmer, he jumped off and hurried to the house. Phil found himself a little late at dinner.

Uncle John, who had waited patiently, asked no questions.

"Sorry to be late, uncle," apologized Phil, evasively. "I spent too much time thinking."

"Don't, lad, don't," responded the old man, huskily. "I know it's hard not to, but no good can come of thinking, thinking, thinking."

"Poor old chap," murmured Phil, sorrowfully, under his breath. "He's completely broken down. It certainly would do no good to tell him what I've learned—at least, not until I know more."

A little food passed our hero's lips; he was too tired to eat much.

Leaving the table, he sought Pomp.

"I want you to call me at just half-past five. I'm going to sleep, but don't you let me sleep over—not if you hope to ever grow old!"

"All right, Marse Phil," grinned the darkey.

Already near the point of exhaustion, and with a presentiment that he would be up all night, young Darley threw himself upon the bed, and was soon in deep slumber.

Pomp was faithful to his trust, and our hero appeared at the evening meal refreshed and strengthened.

"Been sleeping, eh, lad?" questioned John Darley.

"Yes, sir," hiding a yawn, "and I think it's the best thing I can do again, as soon as I've eaten."

It hurt Phil to tell the sorrowing old man a fib, even with such good intentions, but it was the only way he felt sure of being able to get away with no necessity for answering questions afterward.

The meal over, Phil slipped out of the house, across the yard and into the carriage house.

There stood his bicycle, spick-span, clean and in perfect condition, thanks to Dan Devlin's good care of it.

Out through the side door our hero piloted the machine, and across the field, keeping the carriage house between himself and the big house.

Over the wall with it, and into the road. A push, a spring, and he was mounted, spinning over the road at a spurt that soon carried him out of sight of home.

The last light of day was fading before he had covered half of the distance.

It was dark when he dismounted, less than a quarter of a mile from the shanty by the river.

A tolerably safe hiding place for the wheel he found in the woods at a little way from the road.

"Now," he quivered, and sped onward on foot toward the shanty.

Darkness favored his approach, and he at last dropped



down in the same clump of bushes that had favored his eavesdropping earlier in the day.

Ting-a-ling-ling! The sound almost made him jump. It was the clattering peal of the alarm clock that was summoning the ruffianly pair to the night's work—of what?

In almost breathless silence our hero listened.

Refused the two men certainly were, as was attested by the shuffling of their feet across the floor of the shanty.

Soon smoke was seen coming out of the chimney, suggesting that the inmates of the place were preparing supper.

This idea was borne out by the few scraps of conversation that reached our hero's ears.

Yet, except for this scanty knowledge, our hero listened in vain.

When the meal was over the smell of burning tobacco came out through the open doorway.

"Was I dreaming to-day?" fidgeted Phil, beside himself with impatience.

At least an hour and a half he remained in his place of concealment, before he heard the shambling man say:

"Time we was quittin' our smokin' and gettin' to business."

"Yep," assented the other.

There was more shuffling of feet, and then Phil drew a quick breath of impending action.

Out through the door came the pair.

One carried a lantern, unlighted; the other bore in his hand a small parcel wrapped in an old newspaper.

For a moment the commonplaceness of their outfit led our hero to feel that their intended work, whatever it was, could not be anything serious.

But their course served to remove this mild suspicion.

Plunging at once into the woods, the shambling man and the big-fisted fellow set off at a business-like gait.

They were not headed, however, in the direction they would take if going to the Darley house, and this thought gave the boy in the bushes a thrill of satisfaction.

Up and after them he glided, the rubber-soled tennis shoes which he had put on before leaving home rendering his progress noiseless.

Not daring to get too close, even protected by the darkness, Darley heard no important bit of the little conversation that passed between the pair ahead.

Up a thickly wooded slope tramped the men. They had gone a quarter of a mile, and Phil had found no difficulty in keeping in their wake, until he suddenly found himself halted by a dismaying circumstance.

He stood at the edge of the woods. Ahead of him was a barren, rock-strewn stretch of slope, on which there grew not a shrub large enough to hide a cat.

Straight onward tramped the rough-looking pair.

"Shall I follow them?" wondered Darley. "If they turn they can't help seeing me."

He stood irresolute. Through the darkness the moving figures became smaller and more vague every moment.

It was now or never, there was no time to hesitate; they would soon be out of sight, there might not come another chance to follow them. With the light of stern resolve shining in his eyes, Phil sprang forward after them as fast as he could sprint, praying at the same time that luck would favor him and aid him in checkmating these two men, and finding out what connection they had with the disappearance of his father.

After running several hundred yards, Phil saw the pair just in front of him, moving along at the same rapid pace.

The young cadet's sprint had carried him across the open ground, and he was now in a short, narrow gully between two low hills, that was surrounded apparently on all sides by perpendicular slabs of sandstone.

Our hero felt no fear now that the pair would discover him, as the gully was strewn on all sides with huge boulders, behind which he could conceal himself in the twinkling of an eye. He had approached very close to the men; they were only a few yards in front of him now, and he could hear the sullen tones of their voices, though he could not hear what was said.

They had reached the end of the gully; Phil could see no visible outlet to this bowl-shaped, rock-ribbed gulch; the surroundings were all strange to him, and he knew that he had never been there before.

Peering intently forward into the gloom, Phil could see that the two men had stopped at a small, narrow opening at the base of the cliff; they hesitated a moment in a listening attitude, and then disappeared in the cave. Phil did not hesitate a moment, but boldly and silently entered the cavern after them. As soon as he had done so, he became aware that he could hear their voices perfectly distinctly, though he could not see the men that were talking.

A dim light, evidently from a lantern, lighted up the cavern and at the same time filled it with a legion of strange, black shadows.

Phil pushed forward very cautiously to where there was a sudden turn in the rock wall.

Six steps further and Phil Darley halted in sudden terror at the sound of terrible moans, evidently coming from some human being in mortal agony. The groans and moans suddenly ceased as the scoundrels began talking, but our hero's heart beat so loudly that he could barely hear what was being said.

Their backs were turned away from him, which fact gave the boy a chance to reconnoiter.

"So," spoke one of the men, called Jabe, "them's the orders, is they, captain?"

"Yes, the sooner we have it over with the better," said a cold, metallic voice, that seemed to freeze the blood in Phil's veins.

So that voice, that cold, metallic voice, belonged to the man who was called captain by these scoundrels. He was their chief—the man who gave them their orders, and the man who Phil felt sure could tell all about the strange disappearance of his father.

There it was again, that voice. Phil felt that he could never forget the sound of it again as long as he lived. There was a coldness and sharpness about the tones that seemed to pierce him through and through.

"You go first," hissed the voice, "since you are carrying the lantern."

The young cadet was in terrible danger, but by the time the men had faced about he was lying flat on the ground. Phil, prostrate, hugged as close to the wall as he could.

There was a bare chance that—— It worked quicker than can be told. The men, somewhat blinded by the light of the lantern, looked straight ahead, rather than at their feet.

So their first steps carried them by.



Darley, still palpitating with suspense, waited a few moments before venturing to rise to his feet. The instant he was up, he ran forward.

Looking up, our hero saw a narrow cleft in the rock, through which he could see the stars shining. This was fully eight feet from the level on which he stood. At the second jump he caught the overhead ledge with his hands.

A brief scramble, and he drew himself out upon the ledge.

As he did so, there was a loud shout, and the sound of falling rocks.

The weight of his body had evidently dislodged some of the loose sandstone, and the noise made by the mass falling to the floor of the cavern had attracted the attention of the scoundrels, who had returned to investigate, just in time to see the young cadet as he pulled himself up through the opening. Not more than a minute's grace had he. He paused only long enough to note the exact position of the cleft opening into the tunnel.

It was so secluded that one might pass by a dozen times without noticing it.

A leap, and he was down the gulch. Spurt! At head-long speed he dashed down the gully. He neared the end of it with no sound yet of pursuit.

Here he paused just long enough to take one backward look toward the rocks. Across the clearing he dashed, dove into the woods, and never halted until the last vestige of breath had left his body.

Still no sound of pursuit. Had it begun, or were the angry confederates in crime looking for an opportunity to take him unawares.

He reached the road—somehow. He listened constantly, dreading every sound. As he heard nothing, he hurried on towards Burbank, with the intention of telling the chief of police about the men and the cavern, and the terrible groans he had heard.

As he neared his own gate, Phil decided to turn in and get the horse and buggy, and drive to Burbank, as he could get there much quicker by driving than by running. He went around to the back of the house, and called Pomp. That darky was wide awake, and waiting for his young master.

Phil ordered him to hitch up the horse and buggy as quick as lightning. Pomp obeyed as if his very life depended on it, mumbling to himself all the while, as if he was preparing for the day of judgment.

Clucking to the horse, the young cadet drove out of the yard as if the very Old Nick was after him. He felt very much restored by the cool breezes blowing past his face, but still the memory of those terrible moans and groans in the cavern, and the captain's voice, haunted him as nothing had ever done before in his life.

What was that sound? Phil listened intently, even bringing his horse to a standstill for that purpose. His ears did not deceive him, some one was galloping madly in front of him towards Burbank. The hoofbeats grew more indistinct all the while, until they were barely audible.

Our hero wondered who it could be as he whipped up his horse and hurried on.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FORTUNE'S OBSTACLES.

As he neared Burbank his suspense and impatience increased.

Turning into the main thoroughfare, he had only to cross the railroad track, and go two blocks up the street, and he would be at the police station.

It would seem as if obstacles leap into the path of one who is in a hurry.

At the instant when his horse's head was fifty feet from the crossing the gateman began to let down the gates.

In a desperate hurry, Phil tried to get across before the barriers were completely down.

But the gateman, as if bound to frustrate this object, finished the lowering in a hurry, and the boy was compelled to pull up while a freight train rolled by.

He was on the depot side of the track, however.

By the time the train had nearly rumbled by on the up-track, he saw a locomotive headlight in the distance on the down track.

"More delay!" chafed the impatient boy.

A man approached the gate-tender, shouting so as to be heard over the rumble of the cars:

"How soon will the train for New York be here?"

"There she is, coming now, sir," shouted the gateman.

Down the platform walked the inquirer.

Out of the further side of the buggy leaped Phil.

"Hey, there!" he called to a lounge, and the fellow came hastening toward him.

"Take care of this horse?" asked Phil. "If I'm not back in two minutes drive it up the street and leave it at the livery stable until I call for it."

He jerked the words out, as if he could not utter them fast enough, pressed a half-dollar into the lounge's hand and disappeared back of the depot.

There was not a soul back of the depot, not even a cabman, as Phil's swift glance comprehended.

The train for New York was already at the platform when Darley peered into the ticket office.

Oh, the irony of it! The railroad employee installed there was a young woman.

Out on the platform rushed the boy.

Deceived here in his last hope of finding a policeman on the scene, he sprang aboard the train just as it pulled out of the station.

For he had recognized the voice of the inquirer for the New York train.

It was—"the captain."

No assurance could have shaken Phil Darley in his profound conviction that he had again encountered the mysterious "captain."

Features may change with the lapse of time, or through design, and a change in the style of clothing will do much to obliterate a faintly impressed remembrance.

But the voice—the natural, unguarded speaking tone—will remain unaltered and recognizable through years.

Himself concealed by the shadow of the hood of the buggy while in the vehicle, Darley had noted the fashionable gray tourist suit and jaunty straw hat of "the captain."

Now, as he swung onto the car already in motion, climbed the steps and peered in at the door, he saw this self-same individual dropping into a seat.



All by himself sat "the captain."

Sinking into another seat at the other end of the car, our hero pulled his hat partially over his eyes to throw his own face still more into the shadow.

Before the car had gone many miles, "the captain" looked casually around.

"Good!" thrilled the boy. "Now I have seen your face, I shall not easily forget it!"

Just what Phil's plan was, at the instant he boarded the train, it would be difficult to say.

On one point only was he sure. Since fortune, backed by his own prompt, unhesitating action, had put him on the trail of this mysterious scoundrel, the boy was resolved not to cease the pursuit until he had placed "the captain" in custody.

As for the brutish pair of tramps, their case could wait.

Even the thought of the hapless unknown did not deter him or cause him to flinch at this moment.

All centered in the arrest of the leader of the scoundrels.

Yet how was this arrest to be most speedily and securely accomplished? Phil wondered, as he got another glimpse at "the captain's" sharp, eagle profile.

It was an evil face, this man's, but more, a dangerous one. He was not the kind of man who would be easily taken, and Darley shuddered at the thought of bungling.

At this moment the conductor, coming through the train, halted before the eagle-faced man, who handed up a mileage book and said something in a low tone.

"From the number of coupons the conductor takes, my man is going to New York, or pretty near there," reflected the watchful observer.

Our hero, when the conductor reached him, named a station an hour's ride beyond, and paid his fare.

And now Phil, who had quickly conceived a plan, began to run over the names of the stations ahead.

The town of Denby occurred to him as best for his purpose.

Exploring his pockets for paper and pencil, and succeeding, he wrote this message, addressed to the chief of police of Denby:

"There's a murderer on the New York-bound train reaching your town at about half-past nine. Board third passenger coach, with your badge in plain sight, and I will point him out to you."

This Darley hurriedly signed, and pinned a bank note to it.

In breathless suspense, he waited until the accommodation train arrived at its next stop.

It was a country station, with no passengers either to join or to leave the train.

Phil, on the point of hurrying from the car, perceived the station agent standing on the platform.

As soon as the train started, the agent would be directly under the open window before which our hero sat.

So Darley, though in an agony of suspense, kept his seat to avoid attracting the "captain's" attention.

What an age the train seemed to linger at this unimportant station! What trivial circumstance might call the station agent from the spot!

At last! The train started, and Phil, one arm swinging from the window, dropped the precious message into the agent's hand.

The latter looked up, not speaking for a moment, and when he did the car had rolled past him.

But now the boy felt serenely confident that the message would be flashed over the wires without delay.

Surely the stupidest man could not fail to realize the need of "rushing" such a dispatch.

Yet, suspense is the most subtle torturer. A hundred times during the next three-quarters of an hour our hero assured himself that his plan would succeed, and as often dreaded that it would not.

"We're almost there!" quivered Phil, finally, when, from the car windows, he saw the electric lights of the town.

Almost there! The train's speed slackened more and more.

By the time that the motion of the wheels had stopped altogether the boy's nerves were in a state of tension impossible to describe.

Suppose the police should fail to get the message, or having got it, should fail to—

No! All honor to Denby's guardians!

Phil's straining eyes saw a broad, blue-coated man ascend the car's front steps.

Another and another behind him. Denby's entire police force of four had turned out to do honor to the occasion.

For an instant their chief stood in the doorway, looking undecided.

Up to his feet leaped Phil Darley. His extended right hand pointed straight at the eagle-faced man.

"There he is—the murderer!" cried the boy, while the eagle-faced man sprang to his feet, and the other passengers shouted or shrieked in various pitches of astonishment.

"Our prisoner!" roared the chief of police, stepping forward to clap his hand on the denounced man's shoulder.

It was some seconds before anyone clearly realized what happened next.

Two shots rang out, with hardly an interval. Over toppled Denby's chief and his nearest policeman.

Ere the frightened passengers had time to dodge behind the seats, the eagle-faced man, with the smoking pistol still in hand for further use, darted down the aisle and bounded off the car.

Phil, too dazed for an instant to interpose a tripping foot in the way of the fugitive, quickly bolted after him.

Showing splendid presence of mind, the two unhurt officers retreated to the platform, jumped to the ground and started in valiant pursuit.

Crack! Turning, without seeming to slacken in his headlong flight, the eagle-faced man sent a bullet whizzing by within two inches of Darley's head.

Phil promptly stopped and reached for his own revolver, which he had so far forgotten to draw.

Crack! Crack! Halting squarely for an instant, the fugitive fired two shots in swiftest sequence.

Two yells answered, two forms plunged forward to the ground, and now Denby's entire police force was counted out.

Not even pausing to see his victims reach the ground, the flying felon dashed on toward the nearby street.

But Phil Darley was already in fleet chase again.

"Stop!" he shouted.

"Stay back or die!" was the defiant answer, as the



eagle-faced man glanced back over his shoulder to judge the distance.

But all our hero's fighting blood was up.

True, he had witnessed the superb, infernal marksmanship of the man he was after.

Possibly a fourfold murderer within the last sixty seconds, the fugitive dreaded no odds, and could be plainly stopped by nothing short of death.

"Back!"

"I'll stop only when I reach you!"

Crack! Crack! Darley sent two bullets speeding ahead.

But they missed their mark, and the fugitive's only answer was to send another glance backward over his shoulder.

Two more shots our hero fired, and though he must have skimmed his mark, yet the bullets were wasted.

"I'll kill you for that!" warned the eagle-faced man, with a third glance backward.

Phil might have realized that his enemy meant all he said—did realize it—but Darley, at the test, showed the same desperate stuff of which the other was made.

Everyone of the few Denbyites within reach had disappeared as if by magic.

All, that is, except a handful of people who were speeding involuntarily forward to the scene.

For the eagle-faced man had reached the street where, at this very moment, a trolley car was whizzing past.

At the track's edge the fugitive turned, but Phil never paused.

Crack! sounded Darley's pistol, but the sudden glare of incandescent lights blinded his aim.

The shot was answered by a swift explosion, and our hero felt the sting of a bullet in his leg.

Suddenly as thought, the eagle-faced man caught the handrail and pulled himself on the front platform of the flying car.

Lurch! Phil fell forward, but grasped the rear end rail.

He, too, was aboard, and, as he landed, he saw his own blood staining the wooden platform.

Two shots at such close quarters transformed conductor and gripman into fright-made acrobats.

Both sprang off almost at the instant that their unwelcome passengers boarded.

No less agile, the three inside passengers dashed out the rear door, went flying through the air, landing on all fours in the street.

On sped the car at full speed, empty now of all save the two grim contestants in this resolute match for life and death.

"Just one more shot left!" muttered Phil Darley.

Clutching at the door handle he steadied himself and looked through the car.

"He's slipping in fresh cartridges!" quivered Phil.

Had been!—for at that very instant the cool stranger clicked the breech shut and raised his weapon.

"Ready?" jeered the fugitive.

"Ready!" returned our hero, firmly.

Yet the flying car jolted and swerved so jerkily that he hesitated.

Swift calculation made him loath to risk his one remaining shot against the six held by a foe of superior marksmanship.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DRIVEN BY LIGHTNING.

"Oh!" groaned Phil Darley.

His injured, bleeding leg gave way, and down he sank to the platform.

There he hung, crouching low behind the woodwork.

Only the top of his head and his pistol hand were visible.

"Frightened!" jeered the cool fellow on the front platform.

"Come and see," taunted the boy, grittily.

"I will, after you fire your remaining shot."

All the while the fugitive, with his own weapon raised ready to fire, stood a fair mark at the front of the car.

Yet Darley did not chance it.

Were he to miss with the one shot he had left, his doom was sealed, for he had no extra cartridges.

Ahead rushed the car, through the main street of Denby.

A few passers-by were quick enough to see what was taking place, but nothing slower than a race horse or a scorching bicyclist could overtake the lightning-driven car.

True, Phil might have reached the rope attached to the "trailer" and pulled the latter away from the overhead wire.

But to do this he would have to stand upright and give the rope for a moment his undivided attention.

Or our hero might have escaped by dropping from the car into the street, but that would be to give up the chase.

At the rate the car was flying down the main street they would soon be in the open country beyond.

Here the fugitive would have increased chances of escaping.

"I've got to risk the shot or lose him altogether!" quivered the boy. "Heaven help my aim to be a true one!"

Crouching so as to show the smallest part of his body, Darley took fair aim.

Smiling coolly, the eagle-faced man awaited the result.

Crack! Jolt! Roughing over a bumper, the motion of the car upset our hero's aim.

"Missed!" taunted the other. "Now, say your prayers! I'm coming for——"

Bump! Crash!

Chaos followed. Almost wrecked by collision, the car stopped, receded, toppled over.

Wrenching and snapping of timbers, and the sharp din of breaking glass were sounds that Phil Darley heard through a daze.

Then up went a tumultuous yell.

Lying on his side in the street, Phil saw the wrecked car and made out the forms of a score of men.

"There's one of 'em!" he heard a voice shout. "Hold him! Here's the other!"

Several of the men sprang to where he lay.

Most of them were in their shirt sleeves. Some wore firemen's helmets. Not one was there in the lot who did not brandish either an ax or a club.

"Which is the one that's wanted?" demanded one puzzled voice.

Quick as a flash came the eagle-faced man's answer.

"That boy is the one. Hold him. He's wanted for the attempted murder of four of your policemen."



"Don't you believe him!" panted Phil, striving fruitlessly to rise. "He's the one!"

"Now, don't be fools!" expostulated the eagle-faced man, calmly. "Let me up and I'll identify the youngster for you, and tell you all about his crime."

"Yes, let him up," agreed some of the captors.

"Don't let him up!" shrieked our hero, struggling in a tighter grip than before. "Hold us both—hold us tight! Hold us until some one gets here from the depot. If you let either of us get away, be sure that one will be the fellow you ought to have kept."

"Sounds reasonable," contended one of Phil's captors, loudly.

"Wounded, ain't you, sonny?" demanded another man, eying the pool of blood under Phil's leg.

"That fellow shot me," charged Darley, "and he's shot four of your policemen, too."

By this time the tide of belief had turned so strongly against the eagle-faced man that the latter lay unresistingly upon the ground.

Even had he succeeded in shaking off the four men who held him he would have to face a gantlet of ugly men and gone down before their hatchets and clubs.

"Help the youngster to his feet," directed one of Phil's captors—an order which was obeyed with more zeal than gentleness.

Our hero saw by the roadside the local fire department's house.

Every instant now witnessed new accessions to the crowd that flocked to the scene.

From mouth to mouth passed the story, and Darley learned how the climax to the night's wild adventure had been brought about.

One citizen who had witnessed the chase near the depot had had the presence of mind to rush to the nearest telephone.

Over the wire this valuable citizen had sent a wild alarm to the engine house at the other end of the town.

Two minutes had proven ample time for the energetic firemen.

First of all, they had piled a truck across the tracks. After that a few boxes, barrels, stones and logs.

The barrier up, they had waited in sportsman-like silence and darkness for the runaway car, and had bagged their great game.

A trolley car had been smashed and two lives placed in great peril by the collision.

To offset this, Denby had captured a desperate assassin, and Denby was proud of itself.

"Take the youngster over into the doctor's office," called a man in the crowd.

"Take me wherever you like," retorted Phil, "but don't let him get away."

"We won't!" and one enthusiastic Denbyite threw a noose of rope around the eagle-faced man's neck to aid in keeping him prisoner.

"The other end to a tree!" suggested some one.

"Lynch him!"

This cry was taken up by dozens of men, but Denby's fire chief, assuming command, had the prisoner taken into the engine house.

Meantime, our hero was helped across the street to a physician's office.

No bone was shattered, and in a few minutes the ball was extracted and the wound bandaged.

"I can walk all right now, I guess," muttered Phil. "Let me try."

"Not to-night," said the doctor, pushing him back upon the operating table. "If you try it, I'll have a job of amputation to-morrow."

"How soon can I get about?" demanded Darley.

"Well, not sooner than three days, unless you want to lose the leg."

"We'll see about that," grunted Phil, inwardly.

"Do you know," insinuated the doctor, curiously, "that your mysterious adventure has made you the hero of the town to-night. There's a mob outside waiting to hear——"

"What?"

"Well, the whole story of this strange affair, I suppose. Are you aware that that fellow you helped so pluckily to run down shot our whole police force?"

"The whole force?" repeated Darley, his face clouding.

"Everyone of the only four policemen we have," confirmed the doctor.

"Not killed them, I hope?"

"Not quite. The chief is pretty seriously hurt, I hear, but the others are sure to pull through. They're at the house of another doctor near the depot."

"So that, for the present, you're without a police force?"

"On the contrary," smiled the doctor, "we've a new force, and a bigger one than ever. Chub Markham, our fire chief, has assumed police charge of the town, and every man in his department now aches to establish a detective record."

"Can I see Mr. Markham?" asked Darley.

"He's waiting on the other side of the door at this instant."

"Let him come in, please."

Before the obliging physician could reach the door, it swung open and Double-chief Markham hurled himself upon the scene.

## CHAPTER V.

### "FIREMEN WILL BE FIREMEN."

"I heard your alarm—I mean, your question, and——"

Denby's double chief came to a sudden physical and vocal stop beside the operating table.

"How about your prisoner?" Phil queried.

"Well, about the whole town—I mean, he's rigged up to the sliding pole in the engine house, and most every man in Denby's hanging around."

"He can't escape?" asked Phil, anxiously.

"Who? Him? I guess not!"

"Have you questioned him?" Phil wanted to know.

"Have I?" retorted Markham, disgustedly. "I've asked him about two hundred questions."

"And he——"

"Just looks at me without opening his mouth. Now, see here, lad, I've made myself chief *pro tem.* of the police of this town, and the mayor said 'O. K.' over the telephone. I want you to tell me what this fellow we've got tied up is wanted for?"

"For shooting four of your policemen, for one thing."

"Of course. But who is he?"



"I don't know," replied Phil. "It's a long story."

"Oh," replied the double-chief, with a look of expectant interest. "Well, let's hear it."

"And you won't repeat what I'm going to tell you to others who have no business to know?"

"I guess I'm the best judge of who I ought to tell," said Markham, slowly.

"Now, don't talk that way," pleaded Phil, persuasively. "I've got to depend upon you. Yet, if you go out and repeat to others what I tell you, it'll spread an alarm that'll give some of the worst rascals unhung a chance to escape. It may imperil a helpless being's life, too," added Darley, forcefully, as a swift recollection shot through his brain of the unknown confined in the cave.

"Talk up, then," begged the double-chief, "I'll keep mum."

"And you, too?" asked Phil, turning to the physician.

"Yes," promised Dr. Simmons.

Both hearers opened their eyes wider and wider as our hero's narrative went on.

"Can't I get away from here by morning?" Phil asked, desperately, at last.

"You'll certainly have to have that wounded leg cut off if you try it," said Dr. Simmons.

"But that wretched prisoner in the cave?"

"There are police enough in the country, young man, to find that cave," said Markham, gravely. "I'll telegraph to Chief Benton, of Burbank. He'll be here in the morning. You can describe the location of the mouth of the cave to him. He'll find it."

Phil was lifted, wincing with pain, from the operating table to a couch, and made as comfortable as possible for the night.

Early in the morning came a tremendous clatter at the doctor's doorbell.

Markham was the caller, and was in such a state of excitement that it was difficult for him to make known his need to see Phil Darley at once.

"Well?" demanded Phil, waking out of a light doze when the double-chief came into the room ahead of Dr. Simmons.

"Es—es—escaped!" gasped the excited man, sinking into a chair.

"Your prisoner?" shouted Phil, sitting bolt upright, and then groaning with the sudden pain in his leg.

"Yes," nodded the double-chief, faintly.

"But I thought you were guarding him with the picked men of your department."

"So we were, so we were," murmured Markham. "But, you see, Darley, we are a fire department by rights—a police force only in *pro tem.* sort of way."

"But firemen can chain a man, and keep their eyes on him, as well as policemen, can't they?" demanded Phil, incredulously.

"Of course they can, Darley," assented Markham, shamefacedly, "but, you see, there was a fire. The alarm was turned in an hour ago. That took most of my fellows, including myself, and I could only leave a couple of the boys at the police station."

"But couldn't two men watch one prisoner?"

"They ought to have done," agreed Markham, "and they can't explain why they didn't. But they went away from the cell a few minutes to see if they could see where

the fire was. Firemen will be firemen, you know," added the chief, argumentatively.

"But that doesn't explain how your prisoner got out of the cell."

"The bars were pried out of the window."

"Pried off with what?"

"That's what we can't make out," admitted the puzzled double-chief.

"How much of a fire was it?" asked Phil, suddenly.

"Nothing but an old empty barn, on the outside of the town."

"And you don't know what caused the fire?"

"No."

"Oh," muttered the boy, significantly.

"See here," quivered Markham, as the boy's meaning dawned on him. "Do you reckon that murderous scoundrel had friends who started a fire on purpose to draw us out of the town?"

"Well, what do you think yourself?"

"I think," replied Markham, mopping his brow, "that this has been the toughest night the poor old town of Denby ever had."

"Well, the fellow's got away, and there's no help for that," muttered Phil, dejectedly.

"We may catch him again," said Markham, dubiously.

The possibility of these slow people being able to overtake and recapture a criminal of the eagle-faced man's stamp was so remote that our hero had to turn his face to hide a savage smile.

"I've sent men out in teams three or four different ways," continued Markham, hopefully. "Can't you give us some idea, Darley, where to hunt for him?"

"Not the least in the world," replied the boy. "He's too slick to be caught in any ordinary police trap."

Markham went out, a decidedly crestfallen man. In an hour he was back again in as great a hurry as before, and this time Chief Benton, of Burbank, was with him.

Benton heard, took a careful description of the gully, and even drew a rough map of it under our hero's direction.

"I'll find the cave all right," predicted Benton. "I'd like to catch that pair of rascals who call themselves Jabe and Deck."

"Maybe," put in Markham, eagerly, "if you're quick you'll also find the man who got away from here this morning."

But Chief Benton shook his head emphatically.

"No danger of that," he declared. "Your man is the king of the crowd, and he's much too slick to run back there."

"But that poor, wretched, unknown prisoner of theirs——" began Phil.

"I'll set him free if I find him," promised Benton, "and I'll let you know who he is and all about him."

No tidings were gained of the eagle-faced man's path of flight. Phil had not expected any.

It was late in the evening before this telegram came from Chief Benton:

"Searched gully with force of men. Can't find mouth of cave. Still searching and watching."

"Confusion!" muttered Phil, dejectedly. "Has everybody gone blind? I'll go there to-morrow and point out to them the hole they ought to find for themselves."



"You'll not go to-morrow," declared Dr. Simmons, and our hero didn't, couldn't.

But he heard from Benton again the second day, and it was the same old news that there was no cave mouth to be found in the gully.

Not until the fourth day was it possible for Darley to make the journey to Burbank.

Here Dan Devlin was in waiting to drive him home.

When Phil Darley reached home he noticed Pomp waiting at the gate. The darky's eyes were nearly popping out of his head, and he seemed scared to death. Phil then looked at Dan, and noticed for the first time that he, too, looked scared.

"What in thunder is the matter with you all?" he asked.

"Mr. Phil," spoke up Dan Devlin, "your Uncle John done gone away, and never come back no more."

"When?" exclaimed Phil, excitedly. "Went away—when?"

"The day we heard you was hurt in the leg at Denby, sir," said Dan.

Phil was so overcome by this most sudden and unexpected news that he did not know what to do. He became so weak from his wound, and from this second shock, that he had to go to bed.

Chief Benton came on the following day.

Phil told him all about how his uncle had disappeared in the same way his father had, and begged him to tell him what to do.

The chief said it was all too deep for him, but for Phil to keep up his courage, as he thought he would soon be able to get some clues.

"In the meantime," said the chief, "I will drive you over to the gulch."

Phil got in the buggy with the chief, and they soon reached the place.

"Now, will you show me the direction yourself, Darley?"

"The mouth of the cave was here," declared our puzzled hero, staring at the solid rock.

"The cave's been moved, then," laughed Benton, grimly.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TETLEY'S PROPOSITION.

"Will this mystery never end? Is there no sun of knowledge behind the dark clouds of mystery—no star of hope in the sky of night's terror?"

Pallid, utterly dejected, Phil ended his monotonous pacing by dropping into a porch chair.

A week had gone by since his return from Denby—seven days alternately full of hope and of despair.

For the tragic mystery that hung over him had deepened.

Fighting against hope, Phil Darley was yet forced to admit to himself that he was utterly baffled.

Not a trace could be found of his father or uncle.

Chief Benton had done all in his power to find the criminals.

Stirred up by the bloody events at Denby, the county's sheriff had taken a hand in the matter.

Detectives sent by the sheriff had done their best.

Many and long were the conferences they had held with Phil Darley during those first few days after his return.

But these shrewd ferreters of crime had proved as helpless in this instance as the greenest country constable could have been.

That very morning Darley had received a letter from the sheriff, in which the latter had expressed his regretful opinion that the scoundrels had got beyond his reach and would never be found.

Everything conspired to make the boy give up his unavailing efforts.

A new problem also confronted our hero.

Poverty, or something very close to it, was a fact that he must now accept.

Acting under proper permission from the courts, the sheriff had investigated John Darley's lock box at the bank.

The box had proved to be empty, and John Darley's fortune had vanished as completely as his dead brother's had done.

Already bills had begun to come in. To meet them, Phil had spent all but a few dollars of the money in his possession.

Hence the house must either be closed or rented. Darley himself must at once seek some self-supporting position.

There was no position to be had in Roslin. As is the case with most boys, our hero felt that nowhere could he obtain an opportunity except in some large city.

In his case, of course, that meant New York.

Yet to go to the great metropolis also meant that he must give up his hitherto firm purpose of running to earth the gang that had ruined and all but obliterated the Darley family.

Could he give up this purpose? Could he stick to any other work so long as this band of criminals enjoyed, in safety and immunity, the fortunes they had won at the cost of life?

Phil's was not a nature that would admit of a defeat short of death.

He looked about him wistfully at the dear old home, now less cherished through its recent awful associations.

Suddenly a new idea sprang into his mind. The house was his now. The thought had not before entered his mind of parting with this home.

"But it would bring money enough to carry on the battle," he cried, leaping briskly to his feet. "Sold, it will bring the sinews of war. I can yet succeed, if only money is lacking!"

The estates of John and Henry Darley—meaning only this house—must be probated, a guardian appointed, and even then our hero could only wait for his twenty-first birthday to arrive.

"Is there no way by which I can get prompt money through this house?" he cogitated. "I'll go over now and ask Tom Warford about it. He knows a lot about business, and he is a splendid fellow in the bargain. Tom will set me right, if there's any way."

Filled with a hope that even he himself could not account for, Phil left the house at as rapid a walk as he had been capable of since his recovery from his wound.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he wondered over and over again. "The place is worth at least ten thou-



sand dollars—I heard dad say so many a time. Then there's the furniture and other things in the house, and horses and vehicles in the stable."

Dan, Katy and Pomp would have to be remembered when the sale was made; that Phil decided, with a strict sense of justice.

"But there'll be thousands left—thousands!" he cried, with sparkling eyes. "I can pay detectives and offer fair rewards. No need to give up for a year or two to come!"

Still busily planning in this new hopeful strain, he turned in at the gate where the Warfords lived.

Rose Warford, dainty and lovely as ever, came down the winding path at the same moment.

"Phil!" she cried, in pretty delight; "how I shall have to scold you! You've neglected us shamefully. I was on the point of sending Brother Tom over to thrash you for your impertinence in staying away so long. Don't you know that you're the only soul in this neighborhood whom we care to see?"

"I have been busy every moment," he began, apologetically.

"Yes, I can understand that," replied Rose, with sudden sympathy. "I was wrong to speak as I did, Phil, even in jest. Yet I fear that you are no nearer success."

"Not that I know of," admitted the boy, half gloomily. "Yet I have some hope, too. I came to consult your brother."

"Brother Tom is engaged at this moment," replied Rose, disappointment showing in her eyes.

"I can see him if I wait?"

"Yes, certainly. A Mr. Tetley has come up from New York on business. He is Brother Tom's broker—mine, too, for that matter, though I never have anything to do with the details of business. Ah, there they come out of the house now."

Tom Warford appeared, moving across the lawn, arm in arm with a middle-aged, florid-faced man, who was talking rapidly.

"Is Mr. Tetley a friend of yours?" asked Phil.

"Certainly not an intimate one," replied Miss Warford. "We don't see him very often—never, except on business. Tom says that Mr. Tetley is a splendid business man, and thoroughly upright—very needful qualifications, I suppose, in a man whom we trust with our fortunes."

"A splendid business man?" ruminated Phil. "Attends to their business for them. Then he may be an even better one to consult than Tom."

He acted quickly on the thought.

"I wanted to see your brother about a little matter of business, Miss Warford. Now, perhaps Mr. Tetley's experience will enable him to advise me even better. Will you present me?"

Cyrus Tetley looked the boy over shrewdly as soon as Darley made known his wish for some business advice.

"Friends of Mr. and Miss Warford will find me wholly at their disposal," he said, readily. "I will walk over with you, Mr. Darley, and take the train from Roslin."

As Phil and the man of money matters walked toward Roslin our hero spoke of his need of money and the means by which he hoped to raise it.

"Houses and furniture are a little out of my line, Mr. Darley," replied the broker, slowly. "Yet I would be disposed to oblige you if I could see my way clear."

"I am not asking for a loan," said Phil, coloring.

"I understand you perfectly," answered Tetley, calmly. "Yet, even if the estate were probated and sold, you could not touch a penny of the money until you reach twenty-one."

"Then I would have to borrow on the strength of my expectations?" queried Phil.

"Yes, if anyone can be found who will lend."

"But the lender would have the best of security."

"Absolutely none," retorted Tetley, judicially. "You understand, my boy, that I am speaking in a cold, hard, business sense. You are a minor and could not be held responsible for any loan advanced to you during your minority."

"Then there's no way to raise the money?" cried Phil, ruefully.

"No; not unless you could borrow without security. Do you think Warford could be induced to lend it to you?"

"I wouldn't ask him," declared Darley, reddening. "I was in hopes that there was some way by which I could get money advanced purely as a business proposition. If there isn't, then my plans are dashed to the ground."

"Is that the house yonder?" questioned Tetley.

"Yes, sir."

"A fine-looking house. It would be too bad to sell it."

"But I'd do it if I could, sir, for half what it's worth."

"Will you let me have a look at the place?" asked the broker as they reached the gate.

Phil conducted his companion over most of the house and through the stable.

"Darley," began the broker, slowly; "I might be able to accommodate you in a small way. Say, with a loan of a thousand dollars."

"But your security?"

"My only security would be your note, on honor, to repay me as soon as you reach twenty-one."

Phil's face flushed with the pleasure that his new hope gave him.

"If I loaned you the thousand," continued the broker, calmly, "I should expect your note, on honor, mind you, to read for two thousand. You see, Darley, we men of business must have big returns whenever we take risks."

"I'll accept the proposition, with my heartiest thanks," cried Phil.

"Don't be too hasty. I'm going to think it over until to-morrow morning. If I decide to do it, I'll telegraph you to come to New York. If I send for you the money will await you at the end of your journey."

Phil began to pour out his thanks again, but Mr. Tetley cut him short with:

"Say no more, Darley. If I decide to take the risk, it'll be because I've taken a liking to you and believe in your word."

"Thank you."

"One condition—not a word to the Warfords."

"I won't tell them, sir."

Mr. Tetley took his departure, leaving our hero in a jubilant frame of mind.

Now he saw his way clear to some funds that would allow him to prosecute his quest with a good deal of vigor.

Far into the night our hero spent his time planning new steps in his search for the vanished trio of scoundrels.



When at last he threw himself upon the bed, it was to fall into a deep, heavy slumber.

He awoke again, coughing and strangling.

Thick and heavy as the air was, Darley did not all at once realize what the trouble was.

Then a crackling sound reached his ears. A sudden glow shone through the window, and our hero leaped out of bed.

Running to the door, he pulled it open, shouting loudly: "Fire! fire!"

A noise overhead indicated that at least one of the servants had heard him.

Groping through the stifling smoke, Phil hurriedly threw himself into some of his clothes, snatched up the rest in his arms, and made his way out into the hall.

Shouts from above showed that the other occupants of the house were thoroughly aroused.

Unlocking the door, the boy ran out into the yard.

Already the flames were mounting high. Turning the corner, Darley saw the stable also in flames.

At that instant Dan Devlin came thundering downstairs and burst out of doors.

"Katy and Pomp?" called Phil.

But they showed up so close behind Dan as to answer for themselves.

"The horses!" cried Phil, and bolted to the stable, followed by Devlin.

Intent upon rescuing the dumb brutes, they threw open the big door.

Tongues of lurid flame leaped out at them. Inside the stable was a mass of flames.

"We can't reach the horses that way!" roared Dan. "Try the small door."

But here, too, the flames drove them back. The blazing interior roared like a huge furnace.

Shrilly neighing, frantically plunging, the maddened beasts strove to escape.

"We can't reach 'em—the poor critters!" gulped Dan. "Come back here," seizing the boy and pulling him clear of the building.

"But I must try," pleaded the boy.

"No use," retorted Dan. "See what we can do at the house."

But here the task was equally hopeless.

Pomp and Katy, after hauling out a few pieces of furniture, had been driven out of doors.

"This is devil's work," roared Devlin, as the four retreated from the fierce heat. "Do you smell anything, Mr. Philip?"

"Kerosene!"

"Firebugs!" commented Dan, fiercely.

"They can't have got far away!" declared Phil, hoarsely. "Be quick! We may catch them. I know who they are!"

A terrific explosion, a sharp flash, came from the field on the other side of the road.

Whizz! sang a bullet within two inches of Phil Darley's head.

With only an instant's interval there came another shot.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A NEW DISCOVERY.

Between the first shot and the second Phil Darley whirled about.

Standing in the full glare of the blazing barn, he felt himself half blinded when staring into the darkness opposite.

But the second flash gave him the assassin's location.

"Murder!" shrieked Katy.

"Hi, dar! Stop dat ca'lessness!" roared Pomp.

"Mr. Phil! For God's sake, come back!" shouted Dan.

But Phil, never pausing to open the gate, vaulted over the fence, landing with a force that caused a sudden pain to shoot through his old wound.

"Mr. Phil!" cried Dan again, but already the faithful fellow was in full chase after his rash young master.

Spring! Phil cleared the stone wall at the other side of the road, causing another twitch from his wound.

"It's the sharp-faced man—the one who's called the captain," he quivered.

Had he been facing a battery instead of single small firearm, he would not have faltered now.

Well he knew he was running toward the eagle-faced man, for no one else of that crew could shoot so straight in the night.

Nor did he once take his eyes from the very spot whence he had seen the flash come.

"Hiding in the grass," quivered the boy. "He hasn't run yet."

Was the eagle-faced man holding a last shot in reserve to fire point-blank into his young foe?

To that question Phil did not give even a thought.

At last, panting, he reached the spot.

Still no sound—no motion in the long grass.

"On your feet! Face me like a man, if you can!" challenged Phil.

No foe was there, only a long depression in the grass where the would-be assassin had lain.

"You're not far off!" cried Phil. "I'll find you."

"Mr. Phil," gasped Dan Devlin, reaching his side in a breathless state.

"Help me, Dan," commanded the boy. "Keep a few feet away, and we'll beat the grass until we find the cur!"

"But the house?" ventured Dan, though he immediately obeyed orders.

"We can't save that!" cried Phil. "We can find the fellow who fired at me."

But, though they searched swiftly, vigilantly, he whom they sought succeeded in eluding them.

By this time the village was aroused.

Neighbors came hurrying to the scene from all directions. The village's volunteer hose company soon after appeared with their machine.

But the house blazed in a way that mocked at the fire fighters.

Already the stable roof had crashed in, burying the perishing horses.

Some of the neighbors, getting an excited, disjointed account from Katy of the attempted shooting, hastened into the field to aid in the search.

With such an eager corps of searchers, the attempted



assassin must have been caught had he remained in the field.

Yet how had he escaped?

Had he risen, and taken to his legs, he would have been seen.

Even when the house, early abandoned to the overmastering flames, lay a smoldering pile of shapeless embers, the hunt for Phil's assailant continued.

There were threats of lynching.

Had he been caught, the threats might have been carried out, for so deliberate a piece of arson, coupled with such a coolly attempted murder, caused the villagers tremendous excitement.

At dawn the searchers gave up.

Hard by the ruins of the old Darley mansion an indignation meeting was held.

It was then and there voted to give the sheriff's office no peace until the night's outrages had been legally avenged.

Those of the citizens who could afford to, subscribed to a reward to be offered, in the hope of still further stimulating the law's officers.

Phil, touched though he was by the neighbors' ready sympathy, smiled bitterly at their talk of punishing the night's crime.

Many were the kind offers made of a temporary home.

Dr. Stewart offered heartily the one spare room in his house to our hero.

Phil thanked him, but turned first to learn what provision was to be made for that faithful trio who had so long served his father, his uncle and himself.

But there was no difficulty about them. It was in the middle of the haying season, and a farmer offered all three shelter and employment.

Gradually the crowd broke up, for it was now broad daylight.

Phil, feeling as if he were choking, walked down the road with Dr. Stewart.

"Just in time for breakfast, lad," announced the doctor, cheerily, as they went in through the gate and up the steps of the cozy cottage.

Seated opposite the doctor and his wife at table, our hero forced himself to eat, and swallowed an inordinate amount of strong, stimulating coffee.

"Philip Darley here?" cried a loud voice at the window, with a suddenness that made all three jump.

A farmer's lad, whom they all knew, stood grinning at the window.

"Something for you," he called, flourishing an envelope and winking at Darley.

"For me?" asked Phil, wonderingly, rising and going toward the window.

"Yep. Station agent gimme ten cents to bring it up. Telegram. Any answer?"

Before Phil's unsteady fingers had broken the seal he had an inkling as to the sender.

It was from Cyrus Tetley, and read:

"Have decided to make loan. Come at once."

Oh, the grim irony of circumstance!

Now our hero realized even more than before the crushing blow that had been dealt him.

It was not only the loss of a home. He had lost the

last hope of obtaining means for a long, determined fight against his mysterious enemies.

"Any answer?" repeated the farmer's boy, wondering what had caused Darley's pallor to increase so suddenly.

"Yes," replied Phil, shortly. "Wait."

Seating himself at the table, he wrote, in shaky characters, the message:

"Heartfelt thanks. No use. Place burned down last night. Insurance ran out a month ago, and not renewed."

This he folded and gave to the farmer's lad, with money enough to pay the charges.

To his host and hostess he told as much as they needed to know.

Fifteen minutes later Phil was missed from the house.

"What has become of the lad?" questioned Dr. Stewart.

But he was not within doors, nor about the place.

"Gone back to the ashes of his home, no doubt, to grieve," suggested the good woman, with moist eyes. "Go after him—do, dear."

"Not I," promptly replied the doctor, who understood Phil's nature. "It'll be kindness to leave him alone for a few hours."

Very near to the truth Mrs. Stewart had guessed, yet not quite.

Phil had indeed taken the conjectured direction, but not for the purpose of viewing the smoldering ruins.

Indeed, he cast hardly a look in that direction, so intent was he upon getting into the field from which the two shots had been fired the night before.

Searching now in the strong light, he was soon able to discover, amid all the myriad footprints made by neighborly seekers the print of one shoe that recalled much.

A long, narrow print it was, showing plainly, in the deeper marks, indications of an unusually high instep.

The eagle-faced man had such a foot. Phil had noted it particularly on the never-to-be-forgotten night in Denby.

Long, toothpick shoes that cool rascal wore; feet that were slightly pigeon-toed.

"He started to run away quicker than I would have thought possible," ruminated Darley, following the prints, slowly, for a considerable distance down the field. "Here is where he first stood squarely upon his feet, and at this point I could not have seen him through the darkness when I first entered the field."

All track of time, all thought of surroundings was now lost, as our hero followed those prints, seeking them out among the many other later ones.

Their story seemed clear to him. By stretching his own legs he was able to judge the point at which the eagle-faced man had started to run.

"Yet, why did he flee?" puzzled Phil. "That rascal is afraid of neither man nor devil. None can know that better than I."

Still following the trail, though slowly, of necessity, Darley found where the road had been crossed.

Into another field he followed, and then by a belt of young timber. It led to a second road, across it and into a third field.

At intervals the soil was so hard as to leave hardly a trace of the fugitive.

Of a sudden Phil halted, transported by an indisputable discovery.



"No need to hunt for every mark," he cried, elated. "The general direction proves all. He was headed, bee line, dark as it was, straight for the gulch!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FACE SEEN BY CANDLELIGHT.

One look backward, a longer look forward.

"Shall I get help before going further?" cogitated the boy. It would require fifteen minutes, going over the uneven ground, to get back to Dr. Stewart's.

There was no help nearer, no one whom our hero would feel justified in calling on for aid.

One, yes, though, he added on second reflection. Tom Warford could be reached in ten minutes.

But would big, indolent, slow-going Tom be of any use in such an emergency as the present?

Would he not rather be a drag?

Besides, there was a big chance that Tom would not be at home.

The thought of the least delay chafed Darley.

Only a few moments did his hesitation last.

Then he moved off resolutely, straight toward the gulch.

All the way there he kept his eyes open for the sight of anyone to whom he could turn for friendly help in this crisis.

Never had the surrounding country seemed so desolate, of human life!

He found himself finally in the well-remembered strip of woods that lay next to the clearing before the gulch.

To the very edge he crept, and looked wonderingly across the rocky, barren waste.

In the daylight the rocks about the entrance to the gully looked bleakly gray and desolate.

Not a human life was visible there.

Only a moment Phil hesitated.

Stepping boldly out of the woods, he hurried across the waste land.

Cautious approach was out of the question; he could only cover the distance with the greatest possible speed.

Arrived at the mouth of the ravine, he halted, examined the ground and gave a smothered cry.

There were the same footprints, poorly defined, yet unmistakable.

"He went in," exclaimed Phil. "But what's this?" For footprints heading in the opposite direction were also visible.

Plainly the eagle-faced man had been both in and out of the gully.

"Which marks are the fresher?" quivered the boy, sinking upon his knees and examining the outlines.

He could not answer his own question.

Both sets of marks were so faint as to offer not even a suggestion as to which were the more recent.

Vague speculation made the boy more impatient than ever.

Rising, he advanced with swift, searching looks ahead to detect the presence of any such trap as the one that had caught him on his first entrance to this spot.

Lonesome as the grave this ravine seemed, even with the bright light of day streaming in.

"Gooseflesh" pimpled his skin as he ran forward.

For him this gloomy place would be no less than the gates of death, should he actually encounter the man he sought.

Now, for the first time, he fully realized how helpless his unarmed state left him in the face of a foe.

Only once did he pause, and that was to stare at a sharply defined print standing out clearly in a damp bit of soil.

"He went past this point," muttered the searcher, and sped on again.

At last he reached the spot where once he had found the entrance to the cave.

"Am I right?" wondered Phil, staring about him for the landmarks.

Yes, there could be no doubt of it, so he moved straight forward and clambered up on the shelf of rock.

Now his heart began to fail him. Of what use had this hard undertaking proved?

He stood on the same spot where he had tried in vain to find the cave's mouth for Chief Benton.

He had not been able to find it then, and could hope for no better success now.

Sharp, jutting angles of high rock confronted him—the same maze of granite in which he had before labored to find the hole that led to the cave.

He took a doubting step around one of these angles.

Cr-rk! cr-r-rk! cr-r-rk! S-ss-ss!

"Gracious!" yelled Phil, bounding suddenly back.

Coiled in a heap, with head angrily raised and tail busily vibrating, lay a bloated, repulsive-looking reptile.

"Murder!" muttered Phil, backing off, every inch of surface on his body bristling with icy goose flesh. "A rattler, and an old chap, too."

Cr-rk! sounded the rattles, warningly.

For some moments the snake remained coiled, closely eyeing this possible enemy.

Then slowly the reptile uncoiled itself and glided away.

"That's right," murmured Phil, with grim encouragement. "I won't hurt you!"

Lazily the deadly reptile wriggled its slimy length away.

Darley watched the animal's movements in a fascination of fear, saw it disappear—first an inch at a time and then, with a sudden flop, go out of sight altogether.

"Gracious!" muttered Darley again. "O-o-o-oh!"

And stood there, as if petrified, a new light shining in his eyes, despite his bewilderment and fear.

For where the rattler had disappeared was a hole of considerable dimensions.

Phil rubbed his eyes and stared again.

"Eureka!" he shouted, and sprang forward.

He had found again the mouth of the cave!

Yes, there it lay before him, extending downward, and around the mouth were many chipped fragments of rock, as if the short shaft had been but recently reopened.

He sat on the edge of the opening, his feet dangling in, then forcibly recollected the rattlesnake which had gone down there before him.

Strange fear, that of the reptile, when the chance of losing his life in combat with human beings had not deterred him!

"But I mustn't hesitate now—I can't," Darley remonstrated with himself.



Another moment's terrified reflection, then swing! He landed at the bottom on his feet.

For the first instant he stood still, in terrified suspense.

Expecting to hear the dreaded rattle, he waited with palpitating anxiety.

There was no sound as loud as the beating of his own heart.

"Bosh! I'm making a baby of myself," he muttered, with a grimace, and resolutely took a few steps forward in the darkness.

Now he remembered that he had a candle and matches in his pockets.

There was a sputter and a flare, and now he had light to throw ahead.

Nowhere was the reptile to be seen.

Holding the candle before him, the young cadet proceeded rapidly down the tunnel.

The fear of stumbling suddenly upon his three foes made his heart thump anew.

Yet, when he reached the main part of the cave he found it deserted.

"O-o-o-o-oh!"

That sudden, agonized groan brought the boy to a blood-frozen halt.

"That same unknown!" thrilled Darley, spurred to swift action by a repetition of the groan. "The coast is clear. By swift thinking and work I can save him. Heaven help me to do it."

Again came that groan, in a strangely sepulchral tone.

"Where does the sound come from?" puzzled the boy, seeking the direction with his eyes since the sound confused him.

"Where are you?" he hailed. "Speak!"

But there was no response.

"Speak!" implored Phil, again. "Do not be afraid. I bring you hope—rescue!"

"There is no hope," came the now half-sobbing answer. "I am perishing."

The voice, so distorted by torture as to sound like nothing human, made Darley feel sick at heart.

At the same instant, guided now both by eyes and ears, he obliqued to the right and darted onward.

Twenty feet away, only vaguely visible in the dim candlelight, he saw an arched opening in the wall of rock.

Hardly more than two feet wide, it was as high as an average man.

"Courage!" shouted Phil, moving onward. "If human strength can save you, my unknown friend, your torture is near an end."

Through the opening passed our hero, holding the candle before him.

A sharp, right-angle turn he had to make before it was possible to step from the passage into a small cavern beyond.

It was a dozen feet wide, this second cavern, by perhaps thirty in length.

In about the middle of the apartment, on a thin pile of dirty straw, lay the unknown.

Around his ankles were steel circlets, secured by chains to ringed staples driven into the solid rock.

"Courage!" cried Phil, jubilantly. "We'll soon have you out of this, my friend. Light, hope—God's own sunshine—await you!"

Not a word did the unknown reply, but stared at the boy and candle flame with dim, wondering eyes.

"I'll take a look at you first," continued Darley, sinking upon his knees beside the pile of straw and holding the candle close to the wretched being.

A man of middle age, apparently, was the captive, yet so terribly emaciated that Phil's heart throbbed with pity.

Great black rings surrounded the eyes. A thick, matted, tangled beard covered most of the face.

Holding the candle nearer, our hero prolonged his keen look.

"Father! My God!" shouted the boy. "Father!"

Phil Darley was sobbing wildly.

## CHAPTER IX.

### HEMMED IN FROM LIFE.

As soon as he could steady his voice to speak our hero raised the candle flame close to his own face.

"Don't you know me?" he implored.

Wonderingly the dim eyes looked into his.

"Father!" cried the boy, a new terror tugging at his heart. "Dad, you know me—of course you do. Speak and tell me so!"

"I know you?" questioned the emaciated man, slowly. "No, I don't even know myself."

Only a glance into the dim eyes was needed to proclaim the truth of the speaker.

"Why, dad, dad!" sobbed the boy. "You are Henry Darley. Try to think. Hen-ry Dar-ley, and I am your son, Philip. Now, try to think, dad, and you will know me. My God, and we believed you dead! A stranger was buried in your name!"

No light of recognition shone in the man's eyes.

But Phil knew his father—knew him past any doubt, altered though his voice and every feature were.

"No, I don't know you," mumbled Henry Darley, slowly.

But Phil paused no longer to persist or to argue.

Placing his candle where he could see to work, he looked all about him.

A rock, hard as flint, weighing several pounds and having a sharp edge, caught his glance.

It was just the implement he needed.

Picking it up, he glided past his father, and knelt at the old man's feet.

Both lengths of chain trailed on the rocky floor.

Down came the edge of Phil's primitive chisel on one of the steel links. He worked with desperate energy that admitted no fatigue.

Yet it seemed an age before the link was severed, and one of his father's feet was free.

Pausing only to wipe away with his sleeve the perspiration that was streaming into both eyes, the young cadet picked up the rock and began a doubly-resolute assault on the other chain.

"Oh, dad, dad!" cried the boy, as he worked. "Soon we'll be out of here, in God's sweet, pure daylight again. Five minutes more will see us started."

All this while not a sound had come from Henry Darley.

To all seeming he was too confused by the sudden



apparition of his son and by the noise of the work that was going on to be capable of the least connected thought.

He waited patiently, mutely, as a trusting dumb animal might have done.

Suddenly our hero paused abruptly, with the rock poised aloft.

Every drop of his blood feeling icy, he listened in terrified dismay.

"What did you say?" queried his father, feebly.

"Hush, father; I hear some one coming."

"No one to see us," the old man responded, ramblingly.

"I pray Heaven that it isn't," Phil thought, fervently.

But the sound of footsteps became every instant more distinct.

His heart thumping violently, our hero crept toward the entrance of the apartment.

"Throw the light ahead better, confound you, or I shall trip and break my neck," he heard a voice utter, and it was the eagle-faced man who spoke.

"Oh, Father in Heaven," prayed the agonized Phil, "grant that they do not come in here. I must not fail, just when life is beginning again for dad and me."

But it was evident, from the words our hero overheard, that the newcomers were headed direct for the inner cavern.

"You won't know him, cap'n," Jabe declared. "He's changed something awful."

"Changed?" coincided Deck. "The man looks like a ghost."

"All the better," brutally responded the eagle-faced man, who strode at the head of the trio. "And now for a good look at him!"

"Stop!" thundered Phil Darley, in a voice that caused the still invisible trio to bound backward in astonishment.

"Who's there?" called the eagle-faced man in a voice that was steady despite his intense surprise.

"It's old Darley's son," growled Deck, with an oath.

"Yes," shouted Phil, in a voice that rang with defiance.

"Oh, well, we'll soon attend to you," cheerfully rejoined the eagle-faced man, and took a step forward.

"On your life, don't pass the angle in the rock!"

"Don't do it, cap," quavered Deck. "He will shoot."

"Let him shoot, then," roared the leader of the trio, and the hammer of a pistol clicked. "It's a game that both sides can play."

Without a weapon, with even the sharp-edged rock too far away to reach, young Darley felt that the battle was already lost.

Bluffing was out of the question.

Not even the certainty of death would deter the eagle-faced man from springing upon him.

An inarticulate cry came as far as the boy's lips, when his rolling glance rested upon an object on the floor of the cave.

Less than six feet away lay the same rattlesnake that had so frightened him an hour ago.

Now he hailed the new meeting as a glorious chance of escape.

So lifeless appeared that bloated, hideous four feet of reptile that it must have been asleep.

Without a quiver of fear, and aided by the reflected light of the lantern beyond the angle, our hero pounced upon the snake.

In another instant he had its neck between his firm,

strong fingers, and the body near the tail grasped in the other hand.

Now Mr. Snake came to himself, and writhed desperately for freedom.

But Phil held the nauseating thing before him, a secure captive.

He did more, and did it with the swiftness of lightning.

One hand and the head of the snake he thrust beyond the angle.

The eagle-faced man, on the instant of dashing beyond the angle, found the hissing head four inches from his face.

"Ugh!" he shuddered, drawing back, and as he did so, our hero drew the snake's head in just behind the angle.

"Boy," commanded the startled ruffian, sternly, "drop that hideous thing."

"Yes," retorted young Darley, mockingly. "I'll drop him squarely on you the instant I see an inch of your carcass. He'll bite like lightning, you bet. You never saw a rattler as mad as this fellow is!"

Plainly the eagle-faced man was another man of courage who dreaded a snake's poisonous fangs where he regarded bullets with contempt, for the retreating footsteps of all three could be heard.

In a few moments the "captain's" hail sounded:

"Boy, will you give in or die there of starvation?"

"Give in?" repeated young Darley. "On what conditions?"

"Conditions, curse you! What conditions can we make with you? None!"

"Then I'll choose starving to death," Phil retorted, mockingly, though hope had died in his heart.

"Very well," was the jeering answer, still from a distance.

"You will stand there, holding that snake until you are too exhausted to longer control it. Then you would bless a bullet as a means of a swift, merciful release from the tortures you'll endure when the rattler gets the control."

Great icy drops of sweat stood out on Phil's shuddering body.

Yet he stood at his post, still holding his writhing captive in readiness.

His quick ears caught the occasional sounds of the moving men.

Apparently they were at the same distance, but young Darley remained more than ever on his guard.

"If he thinks to catch me napping——" muttered the boy, ominously, to himself.

A sudden glow, reflected from beyond the angle, was followed by a blinding flash almost in his face.

In that awful moment Phil had the presence of mind to hurl the rattler far from him outside.

Boom! A sullen, terrific explosion shook the cave.

Fairly jarred off his feet, Phil Darley was hurled backward.

Landing on his back, he lay utterly dazed for a moment or two.

A crash more deafening than the loudest thunder, a sensation as if the bottom had fallen out of old earth itself, and then all was still as the grave.

"Dad?" was the first word our hero uttered, when he regained his power of speech.

There was no answer.



Still bewildered, Phil got upon his knees, then on his feet.

Fumbling for a match, he soon had a tiny flame, by the aid of which he found the extinguished candle and lighted it.

"Dad!" called the boy again.

But Henry Darley only looked at him with the same mute, wondering gaze as before.

"Alive and safe, thank Heaven!" fervently exclaimed the boy.

Candle in hand, he advanced to the angle.

To where the angle had been, rather—for the explosion had wrought a fearful result.

Huge blocks of rock had been dislodged from overhead.

Piled up now, from floor to roof, they formed an impassable barrier that human hands could not dislodge.

Tons of rock barred the way to liberty and life—hermetically sealed father and son in a living tomb!

## CHAPTER X.

### THE HUMAN MOLE.

"Slow death!"

The words fell tremulously from Phil Darley's lips.

Abandoned, now, was the fight against hope. For a whole hour he had striven to find some way out of their tight prison.

With almost maniacal strength he had tugged at the big rocks, which, dislodged by the blast, now formed the impassable door of their prison.

Not one of them could he budge.

Feebly, as one worn out by mental anguish, he groped his way back to his father through darkness. He had long ago extinguished the remaining bit of candle.

"Dad," he gasped, chokingly, feeling for one of the dear hands and holding it between his own icy palms.

"Torture'll—come—back," moaned Darley, senior, the first words he had spoke since the blast.

"Torture?" repeated Phil, puzzled.

"Yes; oh, it's awful!"

Phil shuddered, though he cried reassuringly:

"No, no, Dad; no more torture can come back. Nothing—"

He paused, but added, despairingly, under his breath:

"Not even help can reach us now."

"It—will—come—back," moaned the old man, already suffering the anguish of anticipation.

"Dad," went on the boy, pressing the hand that rested between his, "don't you know me, even now?"

But the other lay silent.

"Try to remember me—Phil—your son. Think! think! think! Don't let us die as strangers!"

"Die?" repeated the elder Darley, as if fighting off the rambling of his wits. "Can—such—luck—come—to me?"

It was no use. Henry Darley, in his weak-minded state, had forgotten that he ever had a son—had forgotten even his own identity.

In despair our hero gave up the attempt to reawaken his father's mind.

After all, would it not be cruel to succeed?

In his present apathetic state the old man could not realize so keenly the terrors of the death that was ap-

proaching—the horrible death that would ensue when all the pure air in that close, stifling place was breathed up.

As Phil sat there in the darkness he heard a sound as of gravel being dislodged and falling.

Some wild animal, doubtless, a denizen of this cave, was trying to nose its way to outer life.

At first the boy thought of the rattlesnake.

But no, that could not be here now. He had hurled that slimy thing far out of the inner cavern just before the explosion came, and, if still alive, the reptile must be on the other side of the great barrier that the blast had piled up.

Again came the dropping sound.

Young Darley listened intently.

It came, as near as he could judge, from the center of the rock-walled apartment.

"It may be worth while to investigate," he muttered, rising half reluctantly.

Cautiously groping, he made his way to the spot whence the sound seemed to come.

Trip! His feet brought up suddenly against a rock, hurling him over.

"That rock wasn't there before," he muttered, thrilling with a new hope.

As quickly as he could get upon his feet he struck a match and relighted the bit of candle.

Hardly had he touched match to wick when a shower of fine gravel descended upon his head and hands, and extinguished his light.

Before Phil had drawn a second match from his pocket, another fine shower came down, a part of it going down his neck.

"Keep it up—the more that falls the better!" chuckled the boy.

Stepping back a foot or two, he succeeded in relighting the bit of tallow.

Holding the light high over his head, he peered upward.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, and danced for very ecstasy.

Here, at last, was hope of release from their awful prison—only a hope, to be sure, but at this moment hope was hundreds above par.

A heavy boulder of rock had fallen from the roof of the cave—jarred out of place by the force of the blast.

About the rock was gravelly soil. It was this that was now pouring down in a stream of varying thickness.

While Phil watched the stream ceased, but in half a minute it started again.

How many feet thick was this bed of gravel, from the bottom to the surface?

As this problem flashed into Phil's mind his heart grew faint once more with doubt.

Tons of gravel might descend—hundreds of tons, perhaps—even to the point of filling up the cave, before a patch of the blessed blue sky above would be visible through the hole.

With a swift glance, young Darley estimated the roof of the cave to be eight feet from the floor.

The boulder over which he had tripped would form the base of the pyramid he meant to build.

"The candle won't last much longer," he reflected, hardly daring to give form in his mind to the new hope that animated him.

A ledge on which to rest the candle was near at hand.



Placing it there, he turned to survey all the available, portable bits of rock in sight.

Then he went to work with a tremendous will, dragging, lifting and tugging at the rocks, until, on the boulder as a base, he had built a pyramid five feet high.

There was barely room on top for him to stand, yet Phil climbed up and kept his equilibrium.

Sputter! flare! The last "running" bit of tallow candle blazed up with trebled brightness and then went out altogether.

But Phil didn't care. Darkness counted for nothing now.

Did he not hope to soon let in the blessed light of day, which exceeds that of all the candles ever made?

He found that he could reach with his hands the bottom of the gravel overhead.

Burrowing patiently, with gravel smarting in his eyes, gravel choking up his mouth, gravel filling his ears, gravel pouring down his neck and all over him, Phil Darley worked with the patience of a mole.

Yet of what use? After twenty minutes' work he had succeeded in making a hole upward through perhaps a foot and a half of gravel.

Very likely there was yet a depth overhead of anywhere from ten to twenty feet.

"I don't care," he muttered, doggedly, as this doubt came into his mind. "I'd sooner dig on and up, on and up, as long as breath remains in me. It's better than lying down and groaning life away."

Something ropy came into his hand as he burrowed. Phil's first idea was a recollection of the snake, and it made him shudder.

In the next breath he felt more like cheering. It was a root, thin and flexible, that he held in his hand.

The surface, then, could not be so far away. He worked away with renewed, fiercer ardor.

All the while the air grew more stifling. Life could not last much longer, unless greater purity came to the atmosphere.

"I must not fail now, I must not! Heaven grant me strength to the end," prayed Phil, sickened by a desperate fear that all his struggles would end in naught.

More and more roots—a tangle and a maze of them. He was getting nearer the surface.

Of a sudden there came an avalanche of earth. It hurled him off his pyramid, and half buried him on the floor of the cave.

But Phil Darley sprang to his feet again, thrilling with a happiness that none can realize who have not been placed as he was.

Air—sweet, life-giving air—was pouring into the cave from overhead, allowing the noxious, fetid and all but deadly hot air of the cave to escape upward.

"Dad—dad, a chance for life!" cried the boy, exultantly.

But the elderly Darley still maintained his dazed, wondering silence.

Phil climbed the pyramid again. Eyes turned upward, straining his vision, he saw a tiny spot of reflected light.

With convulsive grasp the boy seized some of the tangled roots. Two or three gave way, but he clutched at others in turn.

Slowly, with a straining that told severely on his already exhausted strength, our hero drew himself upward.

There was sufficient room for his body to pass upward—the toy avalanche had resulted in a hole of sufficient size.

Working ever upward, he came to a point where the roots ended.

Bracing his feet in the roots he contrived to push himself gradually higher and higher up.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the puzzled boy, for now he found himself in a shaft lined with wood.

Just overhead was the point through which the light came streaming in, but he could no longer turn his head upward.

Yet, as Phil came nearer the light, he understood the reason for the wood being there.

He was inside the trunk of a hollow tree.

And now he found himself peering through a hole in the trunk of that tree, out upon the sun-lighted world beyond.

Perhaps a little larger than his face was the hole, but not large enough to permit him to poke head and shoulders through.

"Still a prisoner," laughed Phil, "but this is the smallest obstacle of all."

Out came his knife in a twinkling. With such rotten wood as he had to deal with, to cut away a hole plenty large enough was but the work of a few minutes.

"Head and shoulders have plenty of room," ruminated Phil, "trying on" the hole he had made. "Ground outside three feet below. It's easy, but I won't set a foot outside—not until I'm prepared to get dad out after me."

How he accomplished all that followed, the delighted boy hardly remembered afterward.

Tough roots formed the basis of the rope that he made. Strips torn from his clothing bound the roots into a continuous length.

This he tied under his father's shoulders, got the old man upon the pyramid, and then, carrying the rope up with him, got up the inside of the trunk, through the hole and out into the world at last.

As the setting sun went down Phil Darley was patiently trying to hoist the mute, dazed father.

Not a word did Henry Darley say. Limp, utterly without strength, he submitted mutely, and without helping, to all that was done for him.

At last, after great effort, when it was long past dark, Phil Darley had the supreme happiness of seeing on the ground beside him the stupid, almost inert lump of humanity that was the best presence in the world to him.

"Let me help you to your feet," cried the lad, tenderly.

But, though the elder Darley submitted patiently to being raised, he could not stand, much less walk.

Half sobbing, yet wonderfully happy withal, Phil picked up the emaciated form in his arms.

He was strong and sturdy, despite his already herculean efforts, and off they started, one body doing the work of two.

On the slope of the hill, some distance from the ravine, was the spot where they had come up to earth again.

What difference did it make that home was miles away? Phil felt convinced that he could have carried that precious burden many times as great a distance.

Yet every few rods he was compelled to halt and rest.

Then up again and onward.



In the hours of heroic effort that followed not another human being was encountered.

By the time they came near Roslin the villagers were wrapped in the deepest slumber of the night.

Home? Only a word, a remembrance.

Yet there was one friendly roof under which this pair could be sure of the heartiest welcome.

It was after midnight when Phil Darley, admitting his utter exhaustion at last, laid his burden down tenderly on the veranda of Dr. Stewart's house and pulled repeatedly at the bell.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DESPAIR'S PLAN.

"Is there no hope, doctor?"

"I don't say there's no hope," replied Dr. Stewart, gravely. "We medical men have found that there's always hope while life clings even by a thread."

It was the third day after Phil's arrival at the physician's house.

Night and day the boy had remained in the room, watching the silent, almost motionless figure that lay on the bed.

Great rings surrounded Phil's eyes; deep, haggard lines seamed his cheeks.

Anxiety, added to incessant watching, had worn him out.

To his inexperienced eye there was no change in his father, either for better or worse.

To none except the good old doctor and his wife was the presence of the Darleys in the house known.

Phil had insisted on that being kept a secret.

Should the news that he and his father had escaped a living death travel far enough to reach the ears of the eagle-faced man and his satellites, that rascally trio would assuredly make a desperate effort to put both father and son out of the way.

Well enough did the young cadet know their infernal ingenuity to dread, above all, for them to hear of his father's existence and whereabouts.

Now that Henry Darley had been found again—now that his life hung in the balance—Phil did not care one iota for his old, cherished plan of vengeance.

First, to see his father restored to health and happiness; after that, vengeance was but a poor secondary thought.

"You say there is hope," replied Phil to the doctor's last words. "That is, your tongue says the words, but your eyes tell a different thought. Why will you not be merciful enough to be frank?"

"I will," replied the old medico.

Dropping into a chair, under Phil's steady gaze, he continued:

"My lad, there is a hope—a very good one. I will even say—that I can save your father's body. Yet you can see that his mind has gone. Will it ever return? I fear not. Frankly, lad, I fear it is beyond my utmost skill to ever restore your father's reason."

For a full minute Phil stared at the doctor in speechless stupefaction.

"Is there no—no other physician who could——" he began, but broke down.

"No physician whom I could consult?" went on Dr.

Stewart. "There is one, lad, who might do wonders. But why torture you? He is the most eminent man in his line in America."

"Who is he? Where can he be found?" demanded Phil, leaping to his feet.

"Gently, lad, gently," replied the physician. "Perhaps I should not have mentioned him at all, for it will be quite impossible for you to obtain his services."

"Why?"

"The fee——"

"Would be great?"

"At least two hundred and fifty dollars for a single call."

"Surely," broke in Phil, impetuously, "there is that much money in the world."

"But not in your possession," smiled Dr. Stewart, sadly.

"Undoubtedly I can borrow it. Sooner than do without this great physician," he added, impetuously, "I'd even—yes, I'd steal the money!"

"That's impracticable," replied Dr. Stewart, gravely.

"But I can borrow the money."

"Yes, if you have a friend true enough to lend it to you. My lad, believe me, if I had it I would let you have it."

"I believe you," Phil answered, gravely. And he spoke the truth, for Dr. Stewart's poverty was well known in the little village of Roslin, the poorer people of which had often shared the little bounty he had enjoyed.

"Who is this great specialist?" Phil added, immediately.

"Dr. Petrie."

"And he lives——"

"In New York."

"His address?"

Dr. Stewart gave it, and Phil wrote it down.

"I shall see him to-day. He must come. There can be no such word as 'No' for an answer."

"You will go to New York, then?" questioned the medical man.

"At once."

"You have funds enough, then?"

"Phil's face fell. He fumbled in his pockets and brought forth all the money he possessed—less than a dollar.

Quickly Dr. Stewart's hand went into his pocket. It came out holding a worn twenty-dollar note.

"Lad, I offer you this. It will more than pay your expenses."

"God bless you, sir!" cried Phil, accepting in the same spirit in which the offer was made.

"But the loan is made on one condition," added the physician, looking keenly at the boy.

"I'll stick to it, whatever it is."

"You are to go to bed in another room and sleep until to-night. Then I will myself drive you over to Burbank to catch the train."

"But I can't wait that long," cried Phil.

"A day or two's wait will make no difference to your father. If you do not sleep, as I order, lad, you may break down before you reach Gotham. You see, my advice must be taken."

"But I couldn't sleep a wink," protested the boy.

"Yet it will be hardly safe for you to leave the house in daylight. If you are seen by the enemies you dread



so much, it will betray the fact that your father still lives."

"True," admitted Phil, dubiously.

"Whereas, if you let me drive you over in my carriage after dark no one will see you."

Phil was silent.

"Besides, I have your promise to obey."

"That settles it," declared Phil, rising to his feet with something of his former energy. "I'll go to bed, try to sleep, even agree not to dream, if it will oblige a friend like you."

During his first ten minutes in bed our hero revolved in his brain a plan that had come to him.

Broker Cyrus Tetley had been willing to lend him a thousand dollars on a note of honor, secured on the Darley mansion after it should come into our hero's possession.

True, the house was burned, but the land remained. Would not the broker be willing to advance half as much on the same kind of a note, with the land alone for security?

"If dad recovers," cogitated the young schemer, "he'll quickly sanction what I've done. If Tetley fails me, then, as a last resort, I'll telegraph Tom Warford and beg him to lend me the money. He is reputed to be worth millions, and has always professed friendship for me. Yes, I'll try business first, and if that fails, friendship shall be put to the test. Somehow, I'll bring Dr. Petrie back with me."

The problem set at rest, as he believed, Phil slept—slept a deep, dreamless slumber that knew no awakening until Dr. Stewart called to him:

"Night! Time to act, lad!"

And Phil tumbled out of bed, destined, indeed, to meet with need of action.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BETWEEN GLASS DOORS.

"We've made lively time," said Phil, as the doctor's carriage drew up at the rear of the little Burbank depot.

Half opening the door of the carriage, he peered in through the open doorway of the station and read the time from the clock.

"Three-quarters of an hour to spare, eh?" muttered the doctor. "Then, confound it; not only my horse is fast, but my watch, also. Stay in, lad," he continued, turning around in the rear seat, "and I'll drive you about until train time."

"I wouldn't think of letting you do it," Phil promptly objected.

"But if you remain so long in the depot you run the risk of being seen by some one who knows you. You do not want to be recognized yet, I believe?"

"There are only three men, as you know, sir, whose recognition at present I fear."

"Then you feel that you are running no risk, either of yourself or of your father, if I leave you here and turn back?" Dr. Stewart asked, in a whisper.

"Not the least, sir; and I have troubled you quite enough to-night."

"Then good-by, and Heaven's best luck, lad. You have my brother's address in New York. Go there, and

he will put you up, and also take charge of any word I may send about your father."

Phil's thanks were many and heartfelt as he climbed down out of the carriage.

As soon as Dr. Stewart had turned around for the drive back to Roslin, Darley crossed the road to a field back of the depot.

Here, under the shadow of the trees, he could hope to escape the notice of the few passers-by at that hour of the night.

But not so. Hardly had he taken up his inconspicuous post when a cab halted on the same side of the road and not ten feet away.

Something in the tone in which the driver's "Whoa!" was uttered sounded thoroughly familiar.

"Dan," murmured the boy, gliding suddenly forward.

"Mr. Phil!" ejaculated Devlin, in surprise. "Sure, it's glad I am to see you, sir. Yesterday I asked the doctor about you, but he didn't know—you had disappeared. I was bothered about you, and it's glad I am to see you safe."

"Say nothing about having seen me," urged Phil. "Certain people believe me dead. I want them to keep on thinking so for the present."

"I understand," nodded Devlin.

"But how came you to be here with this cab?" questioned Darley. "I thought you had gone to work for Mr. Wheaton."

"And so I did," replied Devlin, "but the job didn't suit, so I've bought this rig with my savings and turned hackman."

"And getting rich, I hope."

"Not very. You see, I've only been in the business since noon."

"And this is to be your stand?"

"Yes, sir. I'm waiting now for the down train from New York; it's due in ten minutes. Maybe there'll be a fare or two for me."

"And since you're waiting," smiled Phil, "I'm going to invite myself to sit down inside."

"And welcome," declared Dan. "I'll stand on the sidewalk and chat with you. But please don't shut that door, Mr. Phil. I find already that I've got to keep both doors open for trade. Besides, there's a trick about them doors. You can't open them from the inside. Once they're closed only the man outside can open them."

"What's the idea?" asked Phil, for Dan's tone seemed to convey a meaning.

"Well, you see, folks ain't all as honest as they might be. Denny Reagan owned this rig till I bought him out. Many's the time, he told me, that a fare'd give an address and jump inside. When Denny got there he'd often find no fare inside. Stepped out, d'ye see, a block or two this side of where they told Denny to stop. Them traveling men thought it was funny, and Denny did, the first time it happened. But it kept on happening, two or three times a week. Then Denny thought he knew a trick that was funnier, and he had the doors fixed."

Though while talking he eyed our hero curiously, Dan Devlin asked no questions as to Phil's next movements.

"Dan," whispered Phil, resolving to share the news with this honest old servitor, "don't breathe a word, but dad's alive and safe up to date."



"What's that you're telling me, Mr. Phil—" Devlin almost shouted.

"Sh!" rejoined Phil, placing a cautioning hand over Devlin's mouth. "Get inside and sit down here with me. I'll tell you all about it."

In a twinkling Dan obeyed, as happy as a boy who hears that the only schoolhouse in town had been burned to the ground.

"How is Mr. Darley? Where is he? Can I see him? What happened him?" were questions that the honest fellow blurted out in hoarse whispers as fast as he could utter them.

Hurriedly Phil recounted the news, even to the business that was now taking him to New York.

"You've told the right man, Mr. Phil. Two hundred and fifty dollars, is it? If you'll wait until the morning, Mr. Phil, you'll have that sum in your inside pocket. I have that and more in the bank, and it's not to anyone else I'd let you go."

"Thank you, my friend," gulped Phil, "but I couldn't take your money. You forget that the only living Darleys are not worth so much money to-day."

"And did I ask you what the security was? and—confound you!—begging your pardon," growled Dan. "Won't take it from me, eh? Then don't you ever look Dan Devlin in the face again and call him a friend!"

"You don't understand," began Phil, now genuinely sorry to see how he had hurt the honest fellow.

"Don't understand, eh, Mr. Phil? Faith, I understand too well, and I never thought you'd turn me by that way."

Devlin's Celtic temper was up.

"Dan," pleaded the boy, "don't get huffy. You're the only friend I've told a word of this to, except Dr. Stewart. Just now I can hardly think. I'm brain-fagged. Don't say a word more about it to-night."

"I'll not, then," promised Devlin, softened. "I'll not say a word more but this: When you get to New York to-morrow and find that broker chap won't advance you the money, you'll send a telegram here to me. I'll do the rest."

"If I need you, I'm sure you will," declared Phil, with a grateful pressure of the other's hand.

"Can I see the master while you're away, Mr. Phil?"

"My father?"

"Sure. He's the only master I ever owned to."

"I'd be glad if you could keep an eye over dad's safety."

"I'll do that same. If Dr. Stewart will let me into the room, I'll keep this in my hand"—here Dan produced a revolver—"and guarantee, Mr. Phil, that not one of them three blackguards, or all of 'em together, will be able to do him harm."

Here was a scheme that suited the boy "from the ground up."

"Dan," murmured the delighted boy, "that promise makes me happier than anything you could say."

"It's done, then," replied Devlin, vigorously. "You sit where you are, Mr. Phil, until the train for New York comes in. After you get aboard of that, I'll drive the horses around to the stable and then set out on foot for Roslin."

"But I don't want to take up your time, and, perhaps, keep you from getting a fare."

Dan replied with a wave of the hand which meant that he cared nothing for business.

The whistle of an incoming train sounded.

"What train is this?"

"The local from New York, Mr. Phil."

"You may have a fare or two."

"Let them walk."

"And you would be out that much. No, Dan; if anyone wants your services, you'll see me bounce out double-quick."

"Don't you do it," replied Dan, though he got out himself and stood by the cab.

There were only two passengers to alight from the train. Straight through the depot they came, glanced about and headed across the street to the conveyance.

Loudly dressed and swaggering were this pair, like men who, unused to prosperity, had suddenly encountered it.

Yet, changed as they were, Phil recognized them the instant they hove into sight. He was out of the hack on the opposite side before they could catch a glimpse of him.

Even Dan Devlin, who had never before seen them, thought he knew them from their description, for they were the shambling man and his pal.

"Take us to the —," said Jabe, naming a low resort in Burbank; and the pair got into the cab.

Slam went the door on the further side, pushed by unseen hands. Slam went the other door, pushed by Devlin.

Inside were the brutish pair, astonished, no doubt, by such promptness.

Up to the box mounted Phil. Reins in one hand, whip in the other, before he had even time to seat himself he brought the lash down over the horses' backs.

Away flew the cab behind galloping horses, Phil Darley on the driver's seat, his foes inside.

And Dan Devlin?

He was on the ground, the most astonished jehu in the State.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE THIRD DEGREE.

Not the least astonished part of the outfit consisted of the horses.

Never before had these animals traveled at the speed now demanded of them by their new driver.

Swish! swish! went the whip, and bound, bound! flew the horses.

Under the railroad gates they dashed just before the barriers could descend to bar their way.

Up the street they clattered, the whip still playing over their backs.

Not a word spoke the driver, but bent his whole energy to urging the animals forward and directing their mad course.

One block, two blocks were passed, and Phil began as suddenly to slow up, an outside lantern just ahead showing him his destination.

"Whoa!" shouted Darley, rising to his feet and throwing his whole weight backward.

Just under the lantern he brought the horses to a stop, squarely in front of the door of the Burbank Police Station.



"Hello, there!" yelled Phil. "Police! Quick!"

Shouts of anger came from inside the cab, accompanied by the sounds of frantic efforts to open the doors.

Oaths rang out. Crash! crash! sounded breaking glass.

Heedless of the horses, which might start at any instant, Phil leaped from the box and sprang to the door farthest from the station.

At the other cab door appeared the sturdy figure of Devlin, for Dan had not chosen to be left behind when there was a trunk rack to ride on.

In the doorway of the police station appeared a head, that of Chief Benton himself.

Perceiving in the first flash that something was wrong, the chief shouted to some one inside to follow him, and bounded down the steps.

Both cab windows were demolished. Jabe sprang out on one side, only to fall into the grasp of Dan Devlin.

The brute, attempting to dive through the other demolished sash, received a blow from the butt of a whip in our hero's hands that caused Deck to draw in again.

"What's wrong?" shouted Chief Benton, at the same time helping Devlin to secure the shambling man.

But Jabe fought with such savage ferocity that it required a blow over the head from the club of the second policeman to bring him to order.

"Here, here!" cried Phil, from the other side of the cab, and Benton, his short club in hand, ran around there.

"Stand back!" roared Deck, aiming a pistol at Phil's head.

Whack! Benton's club knocked the weapon out of the brute's hand.

"What's wrong?" demanded Benton.

"Grab him first!" panted Phil. "Tell you afterward."

An attempt at murder was something wrong, for neither Jabe nor Deck was ready to submit while life lasted.

Whack! whack! sounded the wild medley of falling blows, and Jabe and Deck got in some of them.

But still another policeman came out of the station house.

It was five to two now, and the five had the great advantage of having right and law on their side.

"Stop!" yelled Jabe. "We're gents, we are, and don't want make no trouble."

"I'm through," added Deck, meekly.

"Come in and make yourselves at home," invited Chief Benton, with mock hospitality.

In sullen silence the pair went up the steps, followed by their captors.

"Welcome," added the chief, as they reached the police office.

Phil closed the door, locked it and stood against it.

"Young Darley, eh?" questioned Benton, for the first time recognizing our hero. "Introduce your friends," he added, jocosely.

As for the brutish pair, they stared at our hero in bewildered amazement.

"You, an' alive?" glowered Deck.

"Shut up," whispered Jabe, fiercely.

"Any reason why you're surprised to see the lad?" asked Benton, mildly.

A ferocious oath burst from Deck's lips. He was about to say more, when Jabe gave him a forceful poke in the side.

"As you were saying?" resumed Benton.

"As my friend says," retorted Deck, "shut up."

"And what have you to say," demanded the chief, turning to the shambling man.

"Nothing more than I can say with my mouth shut," retorted Jabe, sourly.

"Who makes a charge?" was Benton's next question.

"I do," answered Phil, firmly.

"Then of what crime do you accuse these men?"

"They are the men you searched the gulch for—the men who abducted my father—who tried to murder us at the moment I had found him—who—"

"Hold on, youngster," protested Benton. "You are making my head swim. One charge at a time, please. First of all"—turning to the policemen—"put these chaps in a cell for a few minutes. After locking them up, watch them through the door. Darley, come this way, please."

Benton led the way to an inner office. Devlin was also invited.

In concise, pithy words Phil told the chief all he knew about the shambling man and the brute.

Benton listened with wrinkling brow.

"I can hold them," he said, finally. "Can hold them for a fairish while, too," he added, with a chuckle. "The local judge is on a three-days' vacation. I'll have to keep these chaps, without a hearing, until he comes back. I'll book 'em simply as suspicious characters now, and they can't get off until the judge holds court again. If the court orders me to let 'em go, then I'll rearrest 'em on one of the other charges you've told me about. In all, I guess I've got charges enough to hold them for the next couple of weeks before we'll have to talk about evidence. That ought to be time enough for us to get our hands on the third and last one of the gang—the eagle-faced man you say they call 'the captain.'"

Benton arose.

"Is that all?" asked Phil.

"All for a few minutes, anyway. I want to talk with those fellows. Perhaps I can induce them to tell where to find 'the captain.'"

"And can I be present?" begged the boy.

"Well," replied Benton, with a mysterious twinkle in his eye, "I don't like to say no, but I'm afraid they wouldn't talk as freely with an outsider present."

Leaving Phil and Devlin in the office, the chief went downstairs to the cell room.

A register pipe, open at both ends, connected the two rooms. Perhaps Chief Benton knew that what went on in the cell room could be heard in the office. Perhaps he didn't.

At all events, Phil heard first some inaudible murmurs, and then the unlocking of a cell door.

"You come out first," he heard the chief say. "Now, what's your name?"

"Mud," replied Jabe, gruffly.

"Where's your home?"

"All over, in rainy weather."

"Don't try to be too funny. Do you know you're in mighty serious trouble?"

"Mud always is, in a spell of dry weather."

"Perhaps I can show you a way out of your trouble," insinuated Benton.

"Got a rain-making machine, eh?"

"You have a pal, or a leader; you call him 'the captain.'"



He's the real chap I want. Now, it might make things a good deal easier for you if you would tell me where I can lay my hands on him."

"Wish I could do it," said Jabe, imperturbably, "but I can't. I never heard of him."

"No nonsense," answered Benton, sternly. "Talk, or take the consequences."

There was no answer.

"Well?" insisted Benton.

Still no answer.

"Search him, Conway," commanded the chief.

There was a longer interval of silence.

"Lock him up again; bring the other out. Search him first. Now, bring him upstairs into the office."

Deck, more surly and lowering than ever, was escorted upstairs.

"Come right in," said Benton, and the first thing he did was to close the register pipe. "Now, Darley, will you and your friend step into the outer office for a little while?"

What took place in the private office our hero never fully understood.

Certainly, the intervening door was so heavy and so well padded that few sounds came through.

But there were occasional sounds that very much resembled scuffling. Once in a while the brute's voice could be heard, as if in sharp protest.

"It's what the coppers call 'the third degree,' I guess," said Dan, with a sagely mysterious look.

At last the door opened and Deck appeared with a policeman holding to his arm, while Chief Benton came out last, muttering:

"I always looked upon the rack as an instrument of barbarity. I wish to heaven I had one now, and the lawful authority to use it. I'd give you chaps a few twists that'd make you——"

But the conclusion of these words was never uttered. Benton checked himself with sudden discretion.

"They won't talk," said the chief, gloomily, as the brute disappeared downstairs. "At least, not yet, though I may find a way of starting their tongues. I'm going up to that place they wanted you to drive 'em to, though I haven't much hope of learning anything there."

"As for you, Mr. Phil——" suddenly cried Dan, holding his watch before the boy's face.

"Gracious!" cried Phil, with a guilty start, for it was within a minute of the time for the New York train to leave.

"Don't let them escape, sir," he begged of the chief.

"Not much," responded Benton, with emphasis. "I'm going to keep a man with a shotgun in front of their cell door the whole time."

Dan hurried down the steps after Darley. Both climbed to the box of the cab, and the horses were started on a run.

"It was a cheeky thing, Dan, to make the use I did of your rig. Those fellows nearly wrecked it," said Phil, during the brief, excitable ride down the street.

"I don't care," replied Dan, stoutly loyal.

Only by a hair's breadth was the train caught. It was well under way when Phil Darley climbed to the platform of the last car.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MAN WITH TETLEY.

"Pluck is a big club, and circumstance is pounding me over the head with it!"

This was Phil Darley's somewhat gloomy view of life after he had been three days in New York.

Full of determination, he had come to New York. He would win—would conquer.

First of all, he would see Broker Cyrus Tetley, and would endeavor to borrow the money needed on a note of honor, on the basis of the proposition offered by the broker himself at their first and only meeting.

"If I don't get the money, I'll cheek the doctor in some way," Phil had resolved, almost without thought. "There shall be no such word as fail."

Yet he had been defeated, and hopelessly so far.

Circumstance was indeed using him roughly.

In the first place, Broker Tetley had not been at his office. He was out of town, the clerks said, and no coaxing, bluffing or threat would induce them to say more.

When would Mr. Tetley be back? They didn't know—hadn't the least idea.

Where was he? They didn't know.

Could a message be forwarded to Mr. Tetley? Certainly not, and the clerks took so little interest in the anxious, pleading boy that they did not even go to the trouble of taking his name.

As for Dr. Petrie, that specialist was out of town. He had stolen away from his practice to snatch a few days' vacation, and after the way of overworked physicians, he had left instructions with his family not to divulge his address or whereabouts.

Our hero had stopped with Dr. Stewart's brother, who lived in New York, and who had made him feel most heartily welcome.

Every day Phil had written to Dr. Stewart, detailing the unluckiness of his quest.

Now, the boy was walking rapidly down lower Broadway, bent on another effort to find Mr. Tetley.

Turning into the side street, where the broker's office was located, Phil found the now familiar number and feverishly ascended the steps.

"He may be back—he may be back to-day," was the burden of Phil's thought, more gloomy than hopeful.

In the corridor Darley stepped aside to allow two gentlemen to pass out.

Phil's side step had taken him behind the elevator shaft.

As he made the move his swift, troubled glance fell on two other men, who, further down the corridor, were also coming toward the door.

Broker Tetley was one of the two men, but the sight of the other caused the boy to reel and almost faint.

Tetley's companion was the eagle-faced man—"the captain"—as the brutish pair styled him.

Further back slunk Phil, trembling as if he had seen a ghost.

Side by side the two men passed out. Neither saw the wild-eyed boy, nor did they address each other.

For a moment our hero, overcome by doubt, horror and new suspicion, was incapable of stirring.

"I must follow them—I can't lose sight of them," gasped Darley.

He ran to the door, looked up and down the street.



There they were, still together, and just turning the corner into Broadway.

Never once, now, did the boy lose sight of them, though following as far behind as he deemed safe.

Tetley and the eagle-faced man went, without stopping, to the City Hall Station of the Third Avenue "L" Road.

Phil saw them at the further end of the long platform.

Two trains were waiting. Seeing the pair board the right-hand train, Phil was about to enter the last car when he felt a tug at the sleeve.

It was Mr. Stewart's son, a boy a year or two younger than our hero.

"Been looking for you," said young Stewart, briefly. "Was just going down to Tetley's office to see if you were there."

"What's the matter?"

"You're wanted at the house."

Phil shook his head impatiently, but Stewart added:

"Telegram. Good news, I reckon. Father told me to fly after you and bring you back express."

"A telegram?" cried Phil.

"Yes, from my uncle, the doctor, up in Roslin."

"Its contents?" demanded Phil, trembling anew.

"I don't know. Good news, that's all. It's up at the house."

"Quick, then," shouted Phil, and he dragged the other boy toward the train.

Click! The train gates closed and the cars began to move.

"No matter," muttered young Stewart, practically. "The other train goes in a minute. Come aboard."

Phil had lost the pair he was following, but to them he now gave hardly a thought.

News from home! Without a doubt it concerned his father. In a fever of impatience our hero questioned his companion over and over again, but young Stewart appeared to know no more than he had said.

In a daze, when he reached the Stewart home, Phil had this telegram from the Roslin doctor placed in his hands:

"Dr. Petrie not needed. Everything O. K. Come back. Hurrah!"

It was vague, after all, this dispatch, but it promised well, and Phil was in a whirl of happiness as he fervently thanked the Stewarts and bade them good-by and dashed off post-haste for the Grand Central Depot.

The last train had gone fifteen minutes before. There was a four hours' wait, but the boy never stirred from the depot.

As soon as the next train was ready he got aboard and waited, consumed with impatience, until a start was made.

Never had the service of a railway seemed so poor and slow. It seemed to Darley as if weeks had passed by the time that Burbank was reached, but he was on the platform before the train came to a stop.

"Cab! This way, sir!" and Phil fairly hugged good, honest Dan Devlin, who stood waiting for him.

There was the hack, freshly repaired and good as ever.

"Inside with you," ordered Dan, bundling the boy in without ceremony.

"I'll ride outside, Dan, for I want you to tell me all the news."

"News, is it?" grunted Dan, pushing the boy back. "Your dad's better. Ain't that enough? For the rest, you'll ride inside, and better pull the curtains down, unless you want some rascals as ought not to recognize you."

Devlin had his own way, and heard no more from his inside fare until Dr. Stewart's cottage was reached.

"It's the first time I had the rig out since you went away," whispered Dan, as the boy hurried toward the house. "I've been staying with Mr. Darley, as I promised you I would."

A grateful pressure of the hand was Phil's only answer. Then the door opened, and he bounded upstairs, where, everything working as if by enchantment, a chamber door opened and there was a glad cry of:

"Phil, my dear boy!"

There was Henry Darley, sitting in a chair, with the old light of reason shining in his eyes and the new light of happiness.

"Don't mind me," said jolly old Dr. Stewart, who had calmly allowed four calls to go to the rival physician in order to be present at this happy meeting.

"And so we're both alive and well, thank God!" cried Henry Darley a few minutes later. "But Brother John is missing, I hear—tricked away by the same scoundrels who so nearly did for me. We'll soon have John back among us, for I'll spend every dollar of my fortune, if need be, to get the detectives on the right scent."

"Your fortune, Dad?" cried Phil.

"Why, yes, of course, my boy," was the cheery answer. "The bank lock box at Burbank is cram-jam full of stocks and bonds, all of them instantly convertible in money. Oh, the first detective who finds Brother John will be a moderately rich man."

Phil flashed a swift but covert glance at Dr. Stewart.

Henry Darley, then, did not know that the last dollar of his fortune had vanished.

"And now, lad," added the invalid, beaming, "it is time for you and me to swap experiences."

## CHAPTER XV.

### HOW A BRAIN WAS WRECKED.

"First of all, am I in the way?"

As he put the question, Dr. Stewart arose and looked at father and son.

"Not at all," responded Henry Darley. "Then I'm going to stay," replied the man of medicine, "because I want to make sure that my invalid doesn't talk too much."

"I know some of the story, dad," put in Phil, eagerly. "Perhaps I can help you by asking some questions. In the first place, what was the object of those scoundrels in making a prisoner of you?"

"Object?" repeated Henry Darley, in amazement. "That was what I expected you to tell me. All I know is that on the morning before I disappeared from the world I was walking along the road, perhaps a mile from here, when, just ahead, I saw a green wagon. It was drawn up at the side of the road, and two men stood by it."

"I passed the men without giving them more than casual attention," continued the elder Darley. "That was the last I knew, until I woke up in the cave. I was lying on a bunch of straw, with my feet chained to rings in the



wall and my wrists fastened together by handcuffs. Every night the same two men came to feed me. Finally, when I was thoroughly weakened and beginning to go out of my mind, the handcuffs were removed, but the chains never!"

"And what was their object in treating you so?" questioned Phil, his eyes flashing.

"That," responded the old man, "I was never able to guess. No matter what questions I asked them, they maintained silence. They brought me my food, once a day, but never very much of it."

"And did they not demand ransom money?"

"Never; though for a while I thought that must be their real aim. At first I was too enraged to offer to dicker with them. Finally, after a good many days, I weakened, and offered to make it well worth their while to release me. But that was after the torture began."

"And what torture did they dare to inflict upon you?" cried the boy, eyes gleaming and fists clinching.

"They didn't do anything in that line," responded his father. "At least, not directly. It was that dreadful thing that visited me when all was dark and lonely; that seemed to take my very life from me; that afflicted me with the most horrible agony; that, even in leaving me, left behind innumerable tiny atoms which crawled over my flesh, and reduced me, by their petty torture, to a condition of abject terror bordering on idiocy——"

"What?" fairly shrieked Phil, leaping to his feet, and twitching creepily. "I encountered that same supernatural thing three times, yet never saw it. No fiend of hades could have filled me with more dread than did that unseen thing."

Henry Darley wiped his damp brow with one feeble hand as he replied:

"It was not supernatural, though my captors, when I spoke of it, solemnly assured me that it was a ghost—a phantom. They sought, those wretches, to unhinge my mind and drive me into lunacy. As if the loathsome thing itself were not enough to do it, without the aid of their grewsome lies! Why, one time they even came in upon me, rigged in sheets, with a dim light, and masquerading as ghosts. Their grotesque mummery was such a sham that I laughed at them—even thanked them—for their coming had driven away that other hideous thing. I told them they were fools to try to help the other ghost, which knew its business better than they did, and laughed at them for trying to form a ghost syndicate. Yet that was their sole purpose—to make me feel that I was haunted at all times, and thus drive me out of my mind."

"And I was visited and tormented by that presence," Phil again cried. "Oh, the creepiness of it—oh, the frightful odor it left behind."

"Naturally," replied Henry Darley, with a weak smile. "Naturally, since the beast is the most unclean and loathsome thing in all creation. It haunts tombs, devours piece-meal the dead washed up by the river, revels in carrion and invariably shuns the light—this fearsome beast."

"Beast?" repeated Phil. "Its name?"

"The cannibal, the blood-sucker of all ages," replied Mr. Darley. "The vampire bat."

"True," nodded Dr. Stewart, who had listened with absorbed interest. "A terrible beast, which, flitting about in the stillness of the night, sometimes feasts on the blood of sleeping human beings. Having once marked its vic-

tim, it returns as often as possible. Yet the vampire is seldom seen. Possessed of infernal cunning, the beast—which is half beast and half bird—takes alarm at the first sign of its victim awakening and flies away, only to return again. In ages past many a luckless wretch pined away and died without visible sickness, thanks to the drain upon health caused by the hideous vampire. Fortunately, the vampire is becoming scarcer with every generation."

"But the horrible insects which it leaves behind?" questioned Phil, in a subdued, horrified murmur.

"Parasites which cover the body of the larger pest," replied Dr. Stewart. "Partaking of the bat's surroundings, they, too, shun the light, and die when long exposed to it."

"Now I understand," gasped Phil, hoarsely, "how the thing got into my room when the door was bolted tight, and the windows closed, all except a few inches at the top."

"And doubtless," pursued the physician, as if fascinated with the subject, "the same vampire afflicted you both. Nothing that lives is as keen in its scent for blood. Father and son, the same blood flows in both your veins. Hence you were afflicted after the vampire found in your veins the same blood that flowed in your father's."

"Let us stop talking of it," shuddered Phil. "But, father, what happened afterward?"

"That I do not know," replied Mr. Darley, "except that gradually my reason deserted me, and I have no more clear recollection until I came out of a deep sleep, here in our good friend's room. He has cured me, and he tells me that it was you, Philip, my son, who saved me from my fearful prison. To you, Phil, my gratitude will take the form that is natural between father and son. As for you, doctor," and the invalid reached out his thin hand to the medical man, "you shall, besides having my warmest friendship, experience also the substantial gratitude of a rich man."

"Dad does not know, then, that he is beggared," murmured the boy, inwardly. "He has had no hand himself, then, in the disappearance of his wealth! He must not know yet!"

"Take this medicine, now," said the physician, and under the influence of a sleeping draught Henry Darley got sound rest that night.

On the morrow, with the doctor present, the second part of the mystery was made clear to Henry Darley, namely the entire disappearance of his wealth, as well as that of his adopted brother's fortune.

The old man listened half in a daze. He could offer no explanation, yet bore up wonderfully well, and silently, under the news that he was little else than a pauper.

Dr. Stewart drove over to Burbank that same day, saw Chief Benton, had a secret conference and brought back the news that the brutish pair had been arraigned at last before the local judge, and had been remanded back to the chief's custody.

Yet neither Jabe nor Deck could be induced to talk about their vanished leader, the eagle-faced man.

Now our hero began to dwell upon what he had well-nigh forgotten in the buzz of later events; namely, that strange momentary meeting with "the captain" in New York, and the latter's unexplained connection with Cyrus Tetley.

Tetley was a man of money, as were all of the victims



of the plots hatched in the infernal brain of the eagle-faced man, and——

But Phil could follow the matter no further. He was brain-tired with the whole great puzzle.

"Instead of a solution, I am only at the beginning," he muttered, with a consciousness of defeat. "I must go over this evening to see Chief Benton. Perhaps he can tell me what I can't seem to guess. Yes, that's what I'll do."

His father had been sleeping through the afternoon, and Phil, during the last three hours, had sat in the darkest corner of the doctor's quiet study.

"Philip! Philip!" he heard a voice calling, softly.

"Here I am, Mrs. Stewart."

"Oh, I did not know you were in the house," replied the doctor's wife, who was greatly flustered. "A letter came a little while ago addressed to you. I put it on the table in your father's room, thinking you would find it there. Your father awoke, saw the letter and now he is greatly excited."

At that moment steps were heard overhead, and then Mr. Darley's voice calling:

"Phil! Phil! Here, this minute, lad!"

Up the stairs bounded Phil, and after him, at a little more leisurely pace, came Dr. Stewart, who had just driven back home from his afternoon calls.

Henry Darley, pallid but really energetic, stood at the table as our hero entered the room.

"Phil," cried the old man, "get ready to start at once."

"May I ask——"

"Nothing, now," replied his father, quickly, waving a letter which he held in his hand. "Get your hat—whatever else you need—fly!"

As the boy hurried from the room, Dr. Stewart entered, and our hero found the two men together, both very much excited, when he returned.

"My boy," cried the old man, eagerly, while Dr. Stewart helped him hurriedly to dress, "a letter came for you. I did not hesitate to open it, for I thought I knew the handwriting. It is from your Uncle John. He is alive, but in the greatest danger. I pray Heaven we may be in time to save him."

"I have given my consent to his going with you, lad," nodded the doctor. "It is only a few miles; you can take my buggy, and action will not harm your father as much as suspense. Hurry down and drive around to the front door."

Phil obeyed, like lightning.

Henry Darley was helped into the buggy, gave the direction, and away they drove, Phil holding the reins.

"Where—what——" began Phil, who saw that his father still held the letter.

"There's no time to talk!" cried Henry Darley. "A second lost, and we are too late to avert a fearful tragedy. Drive faster! Faster!"

Along the road they went, Phil making the horse fairly spin.

But the gait was too fast to keep up.

After going a mile at top speed, it became necessary to jog the animal a bit.

"Now, dad," cried Phil, "will you tell me——"

In the middle of the question he stopped short.

Two figures loomed suddenly up at the roadside, and in the foremost one our hero recognized that deadly creature, the eagle-faced man!

Two pistols were presented at arms' range. Simultaneously two shots were fired, point-blank, at the occupants of the buggy.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WHERE THE DARLEY MONEY WENT.

It was over in an instant.

The two shooters waited only long enough to see the effect of their fearful work, then fled.

No sound came from either of the Darleys.

Falling limply forward, they struck the dasher.

Dismayed by the flashes, terrified by the reports, the horse first shied, then broke into a runaway gallop down the road.

The younger figure stirred. Phil Darley, leaning forward, recovered the reins, straightened back, and with one arm around his father, pulled him also back into the seat.

"Badly hurt, dad?"

"Not a scratch, I believe. And you?"

"Strictly O. K."

No further word was spoken for nearly a full minute.

When at last our hero slowed the horse up they were at least a quarter of a mile beyond the scene of the shooting.

"It was almost miraculous that we both escaped," burst from the boy's lips.

"It was providential, lad."

"I know who they are," added the boy. "They are both in this part of the country now, and must be caught before they can leave."

"But not a minute—not a second—to spare, now, lad. Remember your uncle, my dear Brother John. An instant's delay on our part and we may be too late to save his life."

"But you have not told me where to go," suggested Phil. "You said only: 'Take the road to Burbank.'"

"And keep right on," supplemented his father, eagerly, "until you drive right into the town."

"And then where?"

"To the Arcade House—if you know where it is."

"Yes," answered the boy, quickly, "it is a fourth-rate hotel on the further side of the town. I have seen the sign in driving past. But——"

"Your uncle is there."

"How?" demanded the boy, more puzzled than ever. "Surely he cannot be kept a prisoner in a public hotel."

"He is not."

"You are increasing the mystery, instead of enlightening it," protested young Darley. "Explain! What is in the letter?"

"I do not know how I can tell you," gulped his father, sorrowfully.

"But the letter will speak for itself," tremulously answered Phil. He reached over, and took it from his father's unresisting grip.

"You cannot read it in the dark, lad."

"Then we'll have a light," was the reply, and Phil, bending over, released one of the side lamps, took it into his lap, and finally succeeded in lighting it.

"Now, I'll drive with one hand and hold the letter with the other. Dad, will you hold the lamp so I can see to read?"



Henry Darley silently complied.

In tremulous, shaky characters the letter was written, as if the writer had been laboring under a strain of the greatest emotion.

It began:

"MY DEAR NEPHEW PHILIP: When you have read this through you will despise me, as I have come to despise myself. You will curse me. You cannot do otherwise. I would die a dozen deaths, if that were possible, sooner than send this fearful communication to you. But I must not falter. Duty must be done; wrong must be righted, if it is still possible.

"Learn, then, that I am the direct cause of all your unhappiness, your misery, your ruin. It is I who have made you an orphan, if such you are. It is I who, beyond a doubt, have squandered every dollar of the wealth that you would otherwise have inherited.

"My motive for all this fearful series of crimes? I do not know how to explain it all. It will be better to confine myself merely to the narration of facts.

"It all began, then, with my falling in love. You will smile, will deride the idea of an old and hitherto stayed man like myself succumbing to a tender passion. Nay, it was a fierce, wild passion that was the direct and innocent cause of my ruin.

"You know Rose Warford. Yet, before you read further let me beg you not to condemn her. She is innocent of my terrible sin. Innocent? She is as innocent and pure as I am infernal and foul.

"But I fell in love with her. At last I asked her to be my wife. Judge of my happiness, if you can, when I found that she returned my love. It is the greatest bitterness of all, perhaps, to realize that now she will probably know how foul a thing she loved.

"She was rich—so rich that my whole fortune would be but equal to her income for a few months. 'I love you so dearly, John,' she said to me, 'that I am tortured even by the thought that people will point to the great disparity in our fortunes. I fear they will insinuate that you took advantage of my youth to increase your fortune tenfold. It would render me miserable to feel that not all people believed my husband to be the noble, unselfish man I knew him to be.'

"There was reason in her words. In the presence of her great wealth I was like a pauper insolently claiming a princess. I swore that if she would wait for me I would increase my own fortune—that the knowledge of her great love would spur me on to the greatest efforts.

"'I believe in you, John,' replied that peerless, glorious woman. 'I believe your abilities to be on a par with your love and goodness. Keep our engagement a secret, at present. Do not tell your brother, nor will I tell Tom. We will keep our secret between ourselves until you are able to claim me in a way that will not leave it possible for any one to doubt your disinterestedness.'

"Now I lived in a heaven of delight. We kept our secret, and I set about to devise the means of winning the great fortune I had promised.

"At about this time I fell in with the broker, Cyrus Tetley. He had made some wonderful deals in the market for the Warfords, and had sent their fortune nearly a million higher. When I first learned this I hated him,

for had he not increased the gulf between me and my sweet, pure love?

"Then came the thought: If Tetley has been able to do as much for the Warfords, can he not serve me? I sought him out—told him that I wanted him to manage some investments for me. He demurred; he was already much too busy. Having made his own fortune in Wall Street, he was about to retire.

"Yet I persisted. Finally he consented, and advised me how I could invest ten thousand dollars in a rising market. Ten! I laughed at him, and placed in his hands fifty thousand dollars. It was invested in narrow margins and spread over a large range of stocks. In three days it was in danger. To save my investment I placed another fifty thousand dollars in his hands. The whole was lost. I was still ready to put more money on that first investment, but Tetley seriously advised me to let it go, or I would lose my entire fortune. He had, for almost the first time in his life, gauged wrongly the future of the market. He also advised me to stop speculating or to engage another broker. But how could I? I had more confidence in him than in anyone else. I put more money into other investments in his care, and——"

Here followed details of other plunges in Wall Street, with here and there a gain, but with fearful losses on the whole, until John Darley found his whole fortune had vanished in the vortex of speculation.

"Oh, the bitterness of it! Here I am a beggar, instead of a several times millionaire. My love, who knew nothing of my misfortunes, pierced my heart with her kind, loving words.

"Meanwhile, Tetley had again got his grip on the market. For some of his customers he had achieved wonders in investment. If I only had fifty or a hundred thousand dollars I might still become enormously rich.

"Then the thought of your father's fortune occurred to me. If I had sought to borrow, he would have loaned. But I wanted so much money, and, in the light of my previous losses, he would have looked upon me as a maniac. Perhaps I was mad. At no matter what cost I must get rich!

"It was now that I became acquainted with Leonard Santine. He was a handsome, cool, daredevil fellow, and I soon learned that he had led a desperate life. Now, the devil tempted me worse than ever before. I had the key to your father's lock box, and could visit it at any time without causing comment or suspicion. In that box were the securities that comprised his fortune. If only Henry Darley would disappear for a little while——

"You will understand now the strain of temptation I was in. Somehow, before I knew it, it was arranged between Santine and myself that my brother, Henry, should disappear for a little while. Santine swore on his sacred honor (base parody!) that no harm should befall your father, that he should be a prisoner for a little while, and no worse. Your father disappeared. It was I who emptied his lock box, and the fortune that I thus stole I used in the mad effort to gain the millions I wanted. Yet, believe me, as soon as I had again gained a working basis of my own, I was resolved to secure the liberty of your father, place his restored fortune in his hands, confess all, and beg his forgiveness. You see how thoroughly I knew his almost divinely forgiving nature!"



Here followed the details of John Darley's second series of wild plunges into speculation, with the result that, through Tetley's manipulation, the second fortune was lost as quickly and irrevocably as the first.

"I did not know where your father was," continued the letter. "Santine made me no sharer of his confidence. . . . At last the crash came. I was beggared, with no hope of ever redeeming myself. . . . I was face to face with the awful enormity of my crimes. . . . I saw Santine; begged him to release my brother. He laughed at me, though I had paid him well to serve me. I feared, Phil, that you would get on the track of the truth, and I confided my fears to Santine. While you were sick and unconscious he provided a corpse, secured from some institution, dressed it in clothes of your father, with which I provided him, and thus it happened that your father's body was recovered, as you were made to suppose, and buried. So well was the deception carried out that even Dr. Stewart innocently helped me to carry out the awful farce.

"At last, when I could no longer bear the torture of my conscience, I set out to find Santine. That was the last afternoon you and I were together. I met him on the way to Burbank, told him what I had to demand, and threatened him that if he did not immediately restore your father to freedom I would betray him to the police as my accomplice. . . . Santine laughed in my face; drugged me. . . . I awoke, a captive in a strange place—the same fate that I had caused to overtake your father. . . . Chained, gagged at first, I was left a prey to supernatural terrors. Ghosts tortured me; phantoms attended me night and day. Once in a while two rough men came to see that I had food enough to keep life in my body. But I knew that I was losing my mind. Was it a part of Santine's diabolical plan?

"Do you remember, Phil, the fearful, malodorous specter that visited you one night in the old home? That same intangible fiend tormented me during my captivity!

"Lately, the two men who at first attended me, failed to come. Though I hardly realize how, I managed to effect my escape from my place of detention. I came to Burbank, put up at this inferior hotel, where I am not known, and now I am writing you this fearful letter. My dear boy, take this letter to the police, and when they go upon the search for your father, their first move must be to find Santine."

Here followed the best clues possible to the finding of Leonard Santine, and the writer wound up:

"I pray God that you may find your father alive and well. As to whether you tell my story to that angel of light and purity, Rose Warford, I leave to you. If it were of any avail, I would beg your forgiveness, Phil, and that of your father.

"By the time you have received this a bullet will have put an end to the earthly career of your justly punished and deservedly heart-broken uncle, JOHN DARLEY."

When Phil finished the reading he said not a word. Nor did his father speak.

A winded, foam-specked horse dashed through Burbank and left them at the hotel.

Inside the people knew nothing of John Darley.

Yet, hold on! A gentleman answering that description had taken room 28.

Upstairs hurried the pair. They paused before the door of 28.

It was locked, and they forced the door in.

Following the crash of the wood came the sharper crack of a revolver.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"I THOUGHT SO!"

As they burst into the room a haggard-faced man, with a smoking pistol in his hand, wheeled about and faced them.

"John! John! My God—don't!"

For the erring brother no sooner recognized the intruders than, with a despairing groan, he placed the weapon again to his head.

In two bounds Phil was at his side.

Wrench! Our hero now held the weapon.

"Give it back to me," pleaded John Darley, hoarsely.

But Phil, dodging, opened the revolver at the breach, threw out the cartridges with the ejector, and thrust the pistol into one of his own pockets.

From the boy the wretched creature turned to Henry Darley.

"Don't look at me," pleaded John. "Miserable felon that I am, I cannot bear the scrutiny of your eyes. I thank Heaven that you are alive in the same breath that I beg for my own death."

"And why, John?" questioned Phil's father, moving forward with arms outstretched.

"Curse me, strike me," moaned the wretched man, "and let me die!"

But Henry Darley had thrown his arms around his brother, and now held to him as a reeling man clutches at a tree.

"Curse you, John? Why?" was the mild question. "If I have suffered, so have you. I know your nature, and you would not have done what you did if you had not been mad. Has my life—has any man's life been so perfect that he can afford not to forgive?"

Phil stood looking on at this strange scene with emotions impossible to describe. He did not move—could not speak.

"Is life so black and hopeless," continued Henry Darley, "that none may hope for pardon?"

"Do you—do you mean to say," sobbed John Darley, "that you could forgive so loathsome a thing as me?"

"And why not?" questioned Henry Darley, nobly.

"John, we are old men, you and I. It will not be so many years now before we must both stand in the presence of our Maker and be judged. Could I then, think you, brother, plead before that Divine Presence: 'I ask pardon for my sins, I, who will not forgive my brother!' John, can't you understand—won't you understand—that I love you, my brother, and that in my heart there is no rancor against you? Are your shame and remorse to count for nothing? Must you suffer forever who have already bitterly repented the thing you did in a moment of madness? Would you increase that eternal bitterness by the act of self-destruction?"



The two brothers were clasped in each other's arms now, both sobbing, John Darley convinced of that loving compassion which was freely given him, yet too shamefaced to look the other in the face.

"Phil," cried Henry Darley, "tell my brother whether you have aught of malice against him."

"Not the least in the world," promptly answered our hero, and he, too, embraced the sobbing old man. "Uncle, I know what your misery was when you carried your fearful secret alone. I know what your love for me has always been. Your letter I have read from beginning to end, and I have read between the lines. Come back to life, come back with dad and me, and help us find again the happiness we three once knew."

"You hear," coaxed Henry Darley. "We have ridden fast and furious that this grief of losing you might not be put upon us. Promise to live with us, of us, for us."

Sobbing like a baby, John Darley sank to his knees.

"Up!" cried his brother. "The past is gone! Let us be happy in the future."

John Darley tottered to his feet, but shook his head, sobbing brokenly.

"Will you not help us?" urged Phil.

"How can I—I who have ruined you both?"

"But you can if you will," persisted Phil.

"Lead the way, then; I am in your hands, at your orders."

Submissive as a lamb, John Darley followed them.

Into the buggy got all three, Phil joking about the closeness of their quarters.

Down the street they went, the horse moving at a trot, until they halted before the police station.

"We have a duty to do in here," said Phil, quietly.

"Help must be obtained."

"Well, well, well; talking of angels, here's young Darley, now!" cried Chief Benton, as the trio entered. "We were just wondering what to do with your two prisoners, the fellows named Jabe and Deck. After to-morrow I can no longer hold them on a charge of being suspicious characters."

"To-morrow," replied Phil, "you can arraign them on a charge of abduction. There may also be other charges. I want to see you at once, and privately, Mr. Benton, on this matter."

The reunited brothers were shown into the guardroom; where they took seats, and found much to say to each other.

Chief Benton then led the way into his private office. A man who had been seated with him at the time of Phil's arrival, and who had eyed the boy keenly, followed them in there.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Benton," objected Phil. "I asked for a private audience."

"But this man you will be glad to see, Darley. He is Detective-Sergeant Crinn, from Police Headquarters, New York. I sent for him to come here, to see if he could identify our two prisoners. He will be of the utmost help to us in solving this big puzzle."

"Read this, then," said Phil, handing over John Darley's letter, "and let us hear what Mr. Crinn thinks of the whole case."

Benton read aloud. Crinn listened with contracted brows.

"That explains all," commented Crinn, at length; "all,

so far as John Darley knows it. But there is much more back of this, if we can only fathom it."

"Right," assented Phil, promptly. "And I have fathomed it—at least, I believe I have."

"We are all attention," said Benton, curiously.

In clear, lucid language, the young cadet outlined his theory.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Crinn, and became more thoughtful than ever.

"Blazes!" gasped Benton. "Now, you're going too far, Darley. If you don't look out you'll ruin me. A police official, you know, is responsible for what he does."

"Exactly," assented Phil. "And isn't he sometimes responsible for what he doesn't do?"

"Straight goods," snapped Crinn, approvingly. "Benton, my opinion is that you'd better not be caught napping. You haven't many seconds to lose."

"Can I count on your help, Crinn?" cried Benton, jumping up.

"Most decidedly."

Out of the private office went the chief, but soon came back.

"I've got just three available men besides ourselves."

"That will be enough. And the wagon?"

"That will be here in two minutes."

Not five minutes had elapsed when two vehicles rolled away from the police station.

In the first, a buggy, rode our hero, driving, and beside him was Detective-Sergeant Crinn.

Back of them, in a larger wagon, came Benton, his three subordinates and the two elder Darleys.

Over the railroad tracks they went, and struck the road to Roslin.

Gradually the wagon fell farther behind the buggy.

Phil drove at the horse's best gait. Mile after mile was covered in anxious silence.

"How much further to go?" finally asked Crinn.

"About half a mile."

"Drive more slowly, then. It won't do to seem in too much of a hurry."

Accordingly, Phil slowed up, and the wagon behind took the cue.

"This is the place," Phil soon afterward muttered, in a low tone, reining up opposite a closed gate.

"I'll get out and open the gate," responded Crinn, touching the ground in the middle of his sentence.

Like a flash a figure arose on the other side of the gate.

With amazing rapidity Crinn gave a leap that carried him over the barrier. There was the swift gleam of a pistol barrel before the two men clinched and went to the ground.

Like mad beasts the two fought, Crinn clutching with one hand at the hand that held the pistol, his other hand throttling his opponent.

Click! sounded the opening gate, and Phil was at their side.

"Help me to get that pistol away," growled Crinn. "He wants to sound an alarm."

Quickly Phil succeeded.

"Cram your handkerchief in his mouth," was Crinn's next direction, a task that was not difficult, since the detective's choking tactics forced the captive to keep his mouth agape.



Then, click! click! sounded the officer's handcuffs. The gag was next made more secure.

Just then Chief Benton's wagon arrived.

"Here's a prisoner, Benton," nodded the New York officer. "He is pretty well secured, but you'd better leave a man to guard him."

"It's Leonard Santine," cried Phil, staring savagely at the eagle profile.

"Yes," murmured humbled John Darley.

"Oh, well," retorted Crinn, with a knowing laugh, "Santine will do as well as any other name. Years ago I knew this chap as Tim Brill. He's got plenty of names, though."

Crinn now took the lead, and Phil kept at his side.

All the rest, except the prisoner and one policeman, followed softly across the lawn.

John Darley was shaking strangely, though he followed submissively, and no sound came from his lips.

Stealth, as well as silence, was the rule for the whole party.

Not a light showed in the lower story of the house. Upstairs a soft gleam shone through two curtained windows.

Stationing the two policemen, with revolvers drawn, at either end of the house, Crinn, Benton and the Darleys gained the piazza.

Slipping a fine blade between two sashes of a French window, Crinn noiselessly enabled the party to step into the parlor.

There was no light there, but the detective soon had one of his own.

In the hallway they found themselves next, the rich, soft carpets deadening their footfalls.

Upstairs they went and halted before a door. Crinn tried the handle.

Finding it locked, he put his shoulder to the door and burst it in.

A woman's shriek answered, as the intruders poured pell-mell into the brilliantly lighted room.

Frightened, gasping, but looking bewilderingly lovely in her fear, Rose Warford confronted them.

"You?" cried Detective Crinn, catching the woman by the wrist, and forcing her into a chair. "I thought so!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CONCLUSION.

"Stop!" thundered John Darley.

All his latent manhood aroused by this profanation of the woman he loved, he sprang forward to strike Crinn down.

But Phil caught his uncle and held him.

"Wait," advised the boy.

A large table across the apartment was literally covered with thick piles of bank notes.

At opposite ends of the table sat Tom Warford and Broker Cyrus Tetley.

Startled, of course, were these two men at the sudden, precipitate intrusion. Yet neither stirred from his seat.

Chief Benton's burly form filled the doorway.

No one spoke for some moments.

"Well," slowly demanded Tom Warford at last, "what does this outrage mean?"

"Oh, it means," drawled Crinn, "that the jig's up; that you won't leave here to-night, or to-morrow morning, as you planned!"

Now Tom Warford rose, slowly and with infinite dignity.

Crinn faced him coolly, not five feet away. Neither man made a move to draw a weapon; neither seemed afraid.

"Leave this house," commanded Tom, sternly. "If you do not, take the consequences."

"It won't do," laughed Crinn. "You're magnificent in your rôle of injured innocence, I admit; but you know what this means just as well as I do. Let me add, by the way, that the house is surrounded by a big force of men—Crinn was certainly drawing upon his imagination somewhat in this respect—"so that it won't do you any good either to try to kill us or to break through the windows to safety."

"Ah, I begin to understand, partly," said Tom, ponderously. "You talk as if you were an officer."

"Well, well, well," laughed the detective, mockingly. "Your memory isn't as good as it used to be."

"Are you going to leave?" insisted Tom, patiently.

"No, not just yet. Put these on."

And Crinn, with the utmost assurance, produced a pair of handcuffs.

For the space of a minute the two men eyed each other intrepidly.

Slowly at last Tom Warford extended his hands.

Click! snap! The steel bands were upon his wrists.

"Your turn, now," cried Crinn, advancing upon Tetley with another pair of handcuffs.

With pallid but composed face, the broker looked at Tom Warford, then decided to give in.

"Number two decorated," mocked Crinn, quietly. Then, turning and walking toward the door, he added:

"Benton, I've given away all my jewelry. I must borrow."

In gloomy silence Benton passed over a pair of handcuffs.

But John Darley again lost his self-control. Barring the detective's way, he cried, weakly:

"Both these men may be scoundrels, but surely, sir, not even the angels of heaven could disdain Rose Warford, who, in my honestest days, was my affianced wife."



But Crinn sprang around the old man, and dashed away a phial that the woman was even then raising to her lips.

There was a struggle, but a short one. Crinn triumphed and manacled the girl's wrists.

"Your affianced wife, eh?" retorted the detective, turning upon the bewildered old man. "Well, she may not have any more than three husbands alive, but she's broken the hearts of at least a score of men whom she's duped in the past fifteen years."

Rose Warford had fainted, or had pretended to, but none in the horrified group offered to go to her assistance.

"Now let us see whom we've got," said Crinn, dryly, looking around the room with the air of a collector enumerating his curiosities. "In the first place," pointing to Tom, "what did you call him?"

"Tom Warford," answered Phil.

"Well, that's a nice name," said Crinn, musingly. "Years ago I knew him as Randolph Darrell, alias 'Fatty.' He was considered one of the slickest articles in the confidence line, and, from what I hear, his reputation won't have suffered any from his latest achievements. This fellow over there?" pointing to the broker.

"Tetley," supplied Phil.

"Don't think I ever saw him before, but he's good—in the criminal line. Finding him in the company of this interesting pair, and actually dividing money with them, is enough to guarantee him a long term in Sing Sing. As for this truly charming young woman——"

"Rose Warford," put in our hero.

"Hm!" said Crinn, pursing his lips. "She was born with the name of Rosa Schack. Name didn't suit her when she got more tony. Baby face, angelic purity, high, noble notions, and all that. Her specialty has always been fascinating wealthy men and getting their fortunes away. Her face has truly been her fortune; it has earned her millions. Gentlemen, I tell you, she has always been a peach!"

"Oh, this can't be true," groaned John Darley, covering his face with his hands.

"It is, though," declared Crinn, composedly. "She told you you must have wealth like hers in order to win her. Then Broker Tetley happened along. How fortunate! He could win for you the needed fortune. Well, he did it, didn't he? It would be interesting to know how many rich men, betrothed to Rose Warford, or Rose Somebody-else, lost their fortunes through Tetley's brokerage. Why, the money wasn't even used to buy stocks! These people have kept it outright. No telling how many millions they have won from a dozen or two rich dupes. Let us see, for instance, how much money there is on this table!"

It took a long while to count it, but the result showed over a quarter of a million of dollars in bills of large denomination.

"See here, Crinn," spoke up Tom Warford, suddenly; "this thing will make no end of scandal. Let us go, and we'll quit the country at once. We were going to-morrow, anyway. We'll pay the Darleys back their money, and we'll give you and Benton each a quarter of a million apiece. What do you say?"

"I'll agree to that," said Tetley, gloomily.

"What do you say?" questioned Crinn, turning to Benton.

"You tell him," answered the Burbank chief.

Crinn strode squarely up to "Warford" and struck him in the face.

"First time I ever hit a defenseless man," said the detective. "Hope I'm excused, but that's my answer."

John Darley suddenly perceived that the woman's eyes were open.

"Rose," he brokenly cried, bending over her, "tell me that so far as you are concerned this isn't true."

From those beautiful lips a sudden peal of laughter issued.

"You doddering old fool!" she cried, contemptuously, and John Darley, reeling backward as if struck, was disillusioned forever of his dream.

"I don't blame you," commented Crinn, turning to Phil's uncle. "Rosa Schack has hypnotized far smarter men than you, sir; and no offense meant. You needn't feel badly, sir. With my experience of men, I don't even blame you."

In another room were found securities and money representing a total of over a million dollars. Three cages were also found, each containing a vampire bat.

To the elder Darleys was returned the full amounts so strangely stolen from them.

For the rest, the owners were not found for all the money, yet it is believed that distributed through the asylums of the country are nearly a score of men of shattered intellects who have been victims of this woman, and her confederates who, while robbing rich men, so worked upon their minds by seemingly supernatural occurrences as to drive them insane.

It afterward turned out that the brutish pair, Jabe and Deck, knew not one of their superiors except Santine.

And Santine had not been acquainted with the "Warfords." He had received his orders from Tetley, and had blindly executed them.

In taking leave of them, it may be said that all the members of that foul league are now serving long terms in prison.

The Darleys are abroad now, enjoying the blessings of their restored wealth.

Whenever they get tired of globe trotting they will return to a new home, and be ministered to by Dan, Katy and Pomp.

Dr. Stewart and all others who befriended our friends in their dark hours of need have been splendidly remembered.

The two brothers, hale and hearty, are happy as children, for John Darley has realized how full and loving was the forgiveness accorded him.

But happiest of all three is Phil Darley, the young cadet, who conquered by chance a league of the greatest criminals who ever went unhung.

#### THE END.

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